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THE CHESTER MYSTERY PLAYS.

By GODFREY W. MATHEWS.

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PREFACE.

THE Mystery Plays have been the subject of much philological investigation but have received little attention in any other respect. The present brochure is an attempt to solve some of the problems they raise and to trace the origin of some of the allusions which they contain. The Mystery Cycles still await a competent scholar to edit them with notes in the same manner as most of our English Classics have been produced. Until such an edition is given to the world I hope this little book may prove helpful to the student of these Plays, which are quite as deserving of study as anything in our early literature.

The author wishes to state that he alone is responsible for the opinions expressed in the following pages.

My best thanks are due and sincerely rendered to Dr. Philip Nelson, M.A., F.R.S.E., F.S.A., for much help and advice. Not only did he place his manuscripts at my disposal, but also his great knowledge of the arts of the Middle Ages. I am also indebted to the undermentioned for assistance in various ways: Dr. M. R. James, Litt.D., F.B.A., Provost of Eton; Mr. William Wilson, F.L.A., Chief Librarian, Wallasey Public Libraries; Mr. C. J. Tottenham of the Ryle Library; and Mr. H. Goodenough.

G.W.M.

Wallasey.
March, 1925.

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THE CHESTER MYSTERY PLAYS.

By Godfrey W. Mathews.

Read Dec. 6th, 1923.

IT is impossible to deal adequately with the Chester Mystery Plays without relating them to mystery plays in general. I must therefore deal briefly with the introduction of such plays into England and their development. Unfortunately in English we have never properly defined our terms, but lump all early drama together under the title of Mystery. Strictly speaking, these early plays should be classified under three divisions: Mystery plays, Miracle plays and Moralities. The mystery plays are those portraying biblical subjects only, and they are the earliest. The miracle plays are wider in their scope and deal generally with the lives of the saints. Morality plays were a later development of the first two and are essentially didactic, though the method and symbolism may be various. The theme may be biblical or historical, or perhaps one should say pseudo-historical, and accordingly the play may approximate either to the mystery or the miracle type. We shall find when we come to examine the Chester plays that they are really mystery-morality plays.

We are familiar to-day with the close connection between religion and the drama. The Greek drama had an essentially religious significance, and in the few fragments extant of a still older Egyptian play we find that it formed part of the worship of Osiris. The mediæval mystery plays not only owe their existence to religious emotions but are themselves definitely religious in form.

Concerning the origin of the plays, we are confronted by

two possibilities: Were they composed by the early Church in order to draw the people from the circus and arena, or the licentious productions of the late Roman drama? It is possible, for we must not forget that Christmas was instituted by the early Church as a rival feast to the Saturnalia which was held about the same date; but the second possibility appears the more likely one, viz., that these mystery plays grew out of an attempt to make the Latin Church service more intelligible to the mass of the people. It is on the continent of Europe, and particularly in Italy, that the genesis of these plays must be sought, and there it can still to-day be seen how they grew out of the religious services and celebrations. In many Italian towns on Corpus Christi day, the children are dressed to represent various biblical characters—St. John the Baptist, St. Mary Magdalene, the Virgin and the infant Jesus, and many others. In the spring of this year I was in a Swiss mountain village on Corpus Christi day and it struck me that—though there was no dressing in character—all the elements of a mystery play were there, the whole atmosphere was essentially theatrical. But we need not go further than any Catholic church at Christmas time, with its reproduction of the Nativity scenes, to realize how easily the drama could grow out of Church services and celebrations; it only needs a little action and the mystery play is born. The oldest MS. we have of such plays is one preserved at Orleans which dates from the 13th century, but the plays it contains, ten in number, can safely be dated some centuries earlier.

It may be remarked in passing that there is extant a Jewish play which must be classed as a mystery, dating from the 2nd century B.C. It is a dramatization of the Exodus by Ezekiel of Alexandria.

The first mystery play performed in England of which there is any record is one mentioned by Matthew Paris, who says that Geoffrey, afterwards abbot of St. Albans,

produced the play of St. Catherine at Dunstable in the year 1110. Although this is the first performance of which we have any record, undoubtedly it was preceded by many much earlier; the very fact that the subject was St. Catherine—a miracle subject—suggests that the people were already acquainted with dramatic representation.

It has been contended that these early plays were originally written in Latin. But I can find no reason for thinking so. They are essentially "of the people," and if not at first "by the people" (they became very nearly so in time) for the people. It is more likely that they were translated into Latin, probably for special occasions.

This is an opportunity to say a word about the much disputed question of the relation of our English mystery plays to the older French versions. Undoubtedly the originals of our cycles are French. Whether any of the plays were originally composed in English is an open question, though with the possible exception of the shepherd's plays, I think the answer is in the negative. The similarities to the French are too marked to allow us to suppose them original productions. At the same time they are by no means mere translations; they are in places paraphrases, but in the mass it is better to call them adaptations.

The story is taken from French mysteries but treated with local colour and ideas. For example in the French play of "The Fall," when Adam takes the apple, it sticks in his throat and gives rise to the malformation known as Adam's apple. That is an old French tradition—still current, I believe, among some of the French peasantry—but it is a tradition which has never taken root in this country, though we use the phrase "Adam's apple"; hence in the English versions there is no reference to this incident. Here and there, however, there are passages in our plays which are certainly direct translations. In one

passage from the Chester cycle in "Balaam and his Ass," the Ass says to Balaam:

> Am not I, master, thyn owne asse,
> To beare thee whither thou wylt passe,
> And manye wynters readye was?
> To smyte me yt is shame,
> Ne never yet so served I thee.

The French reads:

> Balaam, suis-je pas tu beste
> Sur qui tu a tousjours este
> Tant en yver comme en este?
> Te feiz jamais chose?

It would be difficult to get a better translation of this passage than the corresponding one in our Chester version.

Warton jumped to the conclusion that because the British Museum MS. of the Chester plays stated that "the author" was thrice at Rome before he could obtain leave of the pope to have them in the English tongue, therefore they were originally written in Latin. But we shall see presently that "the author" was reproducing them from French, not Latin. In fact, it is impossible to conceive the plays as we have them to-day being translations from any Latin original; they bear the stamp of the vernacular not of the classic tongue. As further evidence it is remarkable that, as far as I know, no trace of any Latin copy of a mystery play is to be found in England.

I have already said that probably Mystery plays grew out of an attempt to make the services of the Church more intelligible to the people. When it is remembered that the services of the Church were in Latin, of which the majority of the people did not understand a word, we can readily perceive how some innovating cleric may have tried by a series of tableaux to give a pictorial representation of what the service was about. At first, undoubtedly, it would be a mute show-making, an interlude in the service, but very soon, Joseph and Mary and Jesus and

other biblical characters were given some words to say—probably translations from Scripture passages. Once that began it was only a question of time for the evolution of the full mystery play. At first the clergy only would be the actors, but as the plays grew and more characters were introduced—some such as the clergy could hardly be expected to act,—the laity were given parts, and it was to this more than to any other that we owe the development of the true drama, because it led to the transference of the plays from the inside of the church to the outside, and once outside, they tended to get further and further from the trammels of theology. It has generally been supposed that the reason why the plays, or perhaps more correctly, dramatic representations, were given in the church-yard instead of in the church was the over-crowding which took place on these occasions.

This may have been one factor in the removal, but it may be doubted if this alone would have been of sufficient force to cause the change. We may be sure that the Church would be alive to the dangers of allowing the plays to be performed outside the sacred edifice. More likely it was the result of allowing the laity to act. Not everyone who played the part of an angel or saint was necessarily an angel or saint, and we can easily see that these dramatic interludes offered a fine opportunity to that spirit of practical joking which was so characteristic of the middle ages. Also they gave full opportunity for anyone who owed another a grudge to take revenge. In this connection there is a very interesting story in the Marvellous Adventures and Rare Conceits of Master Tyll Owlglass. The locality of the story is probably either France or Germany, but it is likely enough that something of the kind happened in many places. The story is this: Howlglass or Owlglass goes to live in the house of a priest. This member of the clergy is no better than he should be, for he keeps a mistress. Owlglass and this

woman do not get on together, and he determines to have his revenge. His opportunity comes at Easter when the play of the Resurrection is given in the church. The priest, it seems, had been in the habit of putting the woman in the grave to represent an angel. Here was a fine chance for Owlglass. The story tells how the priest found three of the simplest persons in the town to play the three Maries while he played Christ. Owlglass got hold of these persons and instructed them:—

> Whan the aungel asketh you whome you seke, you may saye, "The parson's leman with one iye." Than it fortuned that the tyme was come that they must playe and the aungel asked them whom they sought and then sayd they as Owlglass had shewed and lerned them afore, and than answered they, "We seke the priest's leman with one iye." And than the priest might heare that he was mocked. And when the priest's leman herd that, she arose out of the grave and would have smyten with her fist Owlglass upon the cheke, but she misesd him and smote one of the simple persons that play one of the three Maries; and he gave her another; and then toke she him by the heare; and that seing, his wyfe came running hastely to smite the priest's leman; and the priest seeing this, caste down hys baner and went to helpe his woman, so that the one gave the other sore strokes and made great noyse in the churche. And than Owlglass seyng them lying together by the eares in the bodi of the churche, went his way out of the village and came no more there.

If that kind of thing often happened, one can understand that the Church would be anxious to get the performances outside the sacred edifice. The Church made several efforts to put down these mystery and miracle plays altogether, but without avail. She had started something which she could not stop, and which soon passed almost out of her control.

The church-yard period did not last very long. Soon the streets and the market place became the setting for these plays, and once there they grew and developed immensely. We find traces in nearly every town in England of any

antiquity of the performance of mysteries and miracles and later moralities.

The place of the clergy, as actors, was now taken by the great trade guilds, and a great impetus was given to the movement by the decree of the council of Vienne in 1311 ordaining the strict observance of the feast of Corpus Christi on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. This day was adopted by most of the Guilds as their annual festival, and as it falls about the period of the longest day, it offered a good opportunity for these out-of-door performances.

The Chester Cycle.

And now it is time to get some idea of the kind of show which we are discussing, taking Chester as an example.

The Chester plays lasted for three days in Whitsun week, nine being performed on Monday, nine on Tuesday, and six or seven on Wednesday. They started early in the morning—at York they started at 5 a.m., but probably later in Chester. The assembly was made at the abbey gateway, where the first performance took place. The plays were acted on wheeled waggons consisting of two stages; the higher used for the representation of the play, and the lower (in later times) as a dressing-room for the actors. At first there may only have been one stage, as there is fairly conclusive evidence that at the earliest period of mysteries, costume was of the simplest; and if the stage directions in some MSS. are genuine or were followed, approaching the simplicity of Eden. Into this vexed question of costume I shall not enter. I think some form of costume was always worn in these plays in England, but it is possible that in the warmer lands of the south—realism in portraying some of the biblical scenes was carried to far greater length than might be convenient in our more northern latitudes.

The waggons were called pageants in most places, but in Chester this word was only used for the performance itself and not the vehicle, so that it is to Cheshire we must look for the origin of the present meaning of the word pageant.

Each waggon was allotted to a separate play by one of the town guilds; when they had given their show the waggon was moved on to some other place where the performance was repeated, while another waggon took its place at the abbey gateway, which in its turn moved on and so through every street of the town in turn. The Chester cycle contains twenty five plays, acted by twenty five different guilds. Their titles and order are as follows:

Subject.	Performed by
1. The Fall of Lucifer.	Tanners.
2. The Creation of the World, Adam and Eve, and how Cain slew Abel.	Drapers.
3. The Ark and the Flood.	Water-Drawers.
4. The Histories of Lot and Abraham, the Sacrifice of Isaac, and the offering of Melchizedek.	Barbers and Wax Chandlers.
5. Story of Balaam and Balak.	Cappers and Linen Drapers.
6. The Nativity.	Wrights and Slaters.
7. The Shepherd's Play.	Painters and Glaziers.
8. The Visit of the three Kings.	Vintners.
9. The offerings of the three Kings and their return to their own countries.	Mercers.
10. The Massacre of the Innocents.	Goldsmiths and Masons.
11. Christ in the Temple.	Smiths.
12. The Temptation in the Wilderness.	Butchers.
13. The Raising of Lazarus, and the healing of the Blind Man.	Glovers.
14. The Journey of our Saviour to Jerusalem.	Corvisors.

Subject.	Performed by
15. The Last Supper and Betrayal	Bakers.
16. The Passion and Crucifixion.	Fleshers, Bowyers, Coopers, Stringers and Ironmongers.
17. The Harrowing of Hell.	Cooks.
18. The Resurrection.	Skinners.
19. The Appearances of Christ after his Resurrection.	Saddlers and Saddletree Makers.
20. The Ascension.	Tailors.
21. The Descent of the Holy Spirit.	Fishmongers.
22. Prophecies of the Coming of Anti-Christ.	Sherman.
23. Anti-Christ.	Dyers and Hewsters.
24. The Last Judgment.	Weavers.

A play was sometimes inserted between Nos. 22 and 23, possibly in lieu of the Assumption, played by the women in pre-reformation days.

In almost every case there is some appropriateness or else a grim humour, often ironic, in the selection of the play allocated to a guild.

For instance, The Creation of the World, Adam and Eve, by the Drapers—one imagines that at that particular episode their services were little required. The Flood, by the Water-Drawers of the Dee—very appropriate. The Massacre of the Innocents, by the Goldsmiths and Masons—we know that these two trades still massacre the Innocents when they get the chance. The Last Supper, Bakers—it needs no comment. The Harrowing of Hell, by the Cooks—the connection is obvious. The Ascension, Tailors—a decidedly ironic touch. Sometimes the connection and the irony is very subtle and is not apparent at first sight, as for instance, the Raising of Lazarus and the Healing of the Blind Man, by the glovers. The Passion and Crucifixion, by the Fleshers, Stringers and Ironmongers. The Resurrection, Skinners.

But perhaps the most subtle of them all is in making the Saddlers and Saddletree-makers do the appearances of Christ after His Resurrection. There you have a true mediæval touch. The apex of irony and humour appears to be reached in giving the play of the Descent of the Holy Spirit to the Fishmongers. Considering what the conditions of fish vending were likely to be in those days, it will be realised that the Holy Spirit was about the last thing that Fishmongers would suggest. I once heard Mr. Bernard Shaw say that when people joked about their religion it was a sign that they were very much in earnest. If that is true the people who were responsible for these mystery plays were certainly very much in earnest.

In many town registers there are records of the expenses incurred in the production of these plays. The accounts are interesting as showing the attempts made to give a realistic setting. They also give us some idea of the monetary value placed upon various characters. For example, there is a very curious bill of expenses in the accounts of the Coventry guilds which I will quote:

Paid for	4 pairs of angels' wings	32d.
,,	,, making and painting new Hell-head	12d.
,,	,, painting Hell-head	8d.
,,	,, pair of new hose and mending of the old, for the White Souls	18d.
,,	,, a pound of hemp to mend the angels' heads ..	4d.
,,	,, Fauston for hanging Judas	4d.
,,	,, Fauston for cock-crowing	4d.

Herod and Judas appear to have been the best paid parts, while God was about the worst paid. So the world acts still!

Expense was sometimes avoided by one guild hiring the property of another whose performance did not fall upon the same day. For instance, in Chester, the Vintners and

Dyers, who played Herod on Monday, had an agreement with the Goldsmiths and Masons, who played the Slaughter of the Innocents on Tuesday, for the use of their waggon on the previous day, paying 15d. towards the cost of repairs and rent of the carriage house.

Before proceeding to an examination of our Chester cycle of plays, other great cycles which we possess may be mentioned. There is the famous York cycle—the largest, containing 48 plays, and in many respects the most important we possess; the only one of which we have what is probably the original acting copy, a manuscript dating from 1415.

Then there is the Wakefield cycle, or (as they are generally called) the Towneley plays, consisting of 32 plays. These plays are remarkable for their humour and in some respects they seem to be more English—that is, freer from foreign influence—than any of the others. The Shepherds' play is a typical early English pastoral, very much akin in spirit to that truly English bit of comedy, *Gammer Gurton's Needle.* It is interesting to note that it is always in the Shepherds' play that the local allusions come in. It is in this play that local references occur which have enabled scholars to identify these plays as the Wakefield cycle. And in our Chester plays it is in the Shepherds' play that we have the allusions to the Conway, Blacon, the Dee and Halton.

The other great cycle is that known as the Coventry Plays, 42 in number. There is considerable doubt as to whether these plays do belong to Coventry, though personally I do not find conclusive the evidence of those who say they do not. They are the crudest, and show more of foreign influence than any of the other cycles. Of course, besides the complete " sets " we have fragments of many more. We know that Beverley and Hull both possessed cycles of plays, which have been entirely lost. We know also that there was a Cornish cycle, the most

interesting thing about which is that these plays were performed in specially built earth-works; there is one still in a state of fair preservation near Falmouth. Sufficient importance has not been yet given to this fact. Perhaps on examination many of our "Roman remains" will prove to be not the scenes of Roman games but of English Mystery plays.

Curiously enough London appears never to have had a cycle. The reason probably is that owing to the presence of royalty at any such performances the expense would have been too great for the guilds to give such a large number of plays each year.

Dr. Philip Nelson has suggested to me that the scenes portrayed in many alabasters and carvings were taken directly from mystery and miracle plays. The more I examine this suggestion the more convinced I am of its correctness. Many of these representations, not only in alabaster but in marble and wood, have all the characteristics that one might expect to find in the work of an artist who was trying to represent, through these mediums, episodes (and we must remember that the representation of these plays was essentially episodal) which he had seen acted in the streets.

I am also inclined to think that an examination of some early wood-cuts, say those of Dürer for instance, reveals also traces of ideas possibly taken from mystery and miracle plays. I have by me a copy of Albrecht Dürer's La Vie de la Sainte Vierge Marie, printed at Nuremburg in 1511. Any one who cares to examine it will find that the pictures suggest scenes and compositions such as must have been familiar to all who had seen these plays in a mediæval town.

And now we come to the vexed question of the authorship and date of these Chester mysteries.

They are generally considered to be the oldest of all the cycles still extant. At first sight this may seem

rather doubtful, for on comparing them with the York, Towneley and Coventry plays, their superiority in style and their freeness from some of the grosser elements to be found in some of the other cycles might incline one to think that they are of a later date. It frequently happens that customs, practices, pageants, etc., deteriorate in the course of time. They tend to lose the ideal significance which they once possessed and become merely topical and vulgar celebrations. Remembering the origin of the mystery play in the service of the Church we should expect that the nearer we get to the source the freer from vulgar elements we should find them. Between the mystery and miracle play as they were first conceived and written, and as they were acted in the streets, there was undoubtedly a wide divergence. How then are we to account for our Chester plays being so free from appeals to what to-day we should call the gallery, but what was then literally the gutter? Before answering that question let me enumerate the existing MSS. of the plays; they are five in number.

1. Dated 1591, by Ed. Gregorie, a scholar of Bunbury. In the library of the Duke of Devonshire.

2. Dated 1592, by George Bellin. Add. MS. 10305, in the British Museum.

3. Dated 1600, by George Bellin. Harl. 2013, in the British Museum.

4. Dated 1604, by William Bedford. In the Bodleian.

5. Dated 1607, by James Miller. Harl. 2124, in the British Museum.

It is curious that all the MSS. should bear dates within a period of 16 years.

Now whether or not the author[1] of these plays was (as is generally asserted) Ranulph Higden, a monk of Chester, who is said to have died there a very old man in 1353, I think there is sufficient evidence for believing

[1] By author must be understood translator, or as I prefer to say adapter.

that they were produced and probably played during the mayoralty of Sir John Arneway, who was mayor of Chester between 1268 and 1276.

If the plays were written about 1268, how is it that our earliest MS. is dated 1591? There is a MS. of the Towneley plays dated about 1388. The York MS. belongs to 1415, while the earliest MS. of the Coventry plays is 1468. Why then are the Chester MSS. so late in date?

It is significant that the last year of which we have any record of the Chester plays being performed was in 1576. The archbishop of York had prohibited them in 1571, and in 1575 the mayor, Sir John Savage, got into trouble for allowing them to be performed. They seem to have been played again the next year, but after that, as far as we know, only odd plays were occasionally acted.

From an old record dated 30th April, 1567, we learn that one Randell Trevor "was arraigned before the mayor and was demanded for the originall booke of the Whydson Plaies." He confessed, "that we have had the same booke, which booke he deposeth upon the holy evangelists of God that by commandment he delivered againe; but where the same is now, or to whom he then delivered the same booke, deposeth likewise he knoweth not." These two facts, viz., that the original town-copy of the plays had been lost in 1567, and that the acting of the plays ceased in 1576, together with the fact that our earliest MS. is dated 1591, suggest strongly that some section of the community, desiring to have the plays preserved in print, had a transcript of them made. I surmise that Edward Gregorie and George Bellin wrote their manuscripts from the players' copies—for each guild must have had one—and also from the French originals. The Chester plays as we possess them to-day bear marks of being literary compositions. I believe that if ever one of the guild copies is found it will prove

to be different in many respects from our present MSS.; it is possible that in style it may be nearer to the York and Towneley plays, though there is good ground for believing that the religious element was more marked in Chester than in other places, for the monks of the abbey always seem to have exercised a certain oversight.

That the writer of the 1592 MS. was copying is evident from the copyist's errors in it; I believe these are many, for some passages are almost unintelligible. To give one example: In Noah's Flood, Noah says "Ha! children, methinks my botte renewes," which does not make sense. The writer has copied renewes for remeves, the old form of removes. Harl. 2124 has "remeves" in this place.

In the main I believe the plays as we have them to-day have been transcribed from a player's copy; but frequently the copier appears to have touched them up to give them a more literary and finished appearance, and here and there to have had recourse to the French originals. We know how an old musical comedy is sometimes touched up and reproduced. Some of the old jokes and topical allusions are dropped and new ones inserted. This seems to have happened to these mystery plays. We cannot regard them as a homogeneous whole; in their travels through the centuries they picked up, and doubtless dropped, many various elements, traditions, beliefs, superstitions and local allusions.

After carefully examining the plays I cannot find any means of determining their date from internal evidence. Several times I thought I had found a clue, but on more careful investigation it proved nothing. It occurred to me, for example, that some light might be gained from an examination of individual words and phrases used. This I have tried frequently but with little result, though it is possible that research along these lines might in competent hands yield some light. As an example I will instance one word. In the play of the Creation and Fall, the

serpent that tempts Eve is called an "edder." In the York play of the same subject it is called by the old Anglo-Saxon appellation "worme." "Edder" is derived from the Old English word "naeder." The "n" was dropped in Middle English from 1300-1500 through the mistake of writing 'an addre' for 'a naddre.' Now if this play had been written previous to about 1300 we should have had the word written "naeder." If on the other hand the writer of the 1592 MS. had been composing and not copying we should probably have had the modern form, for in 1601 Shakespeare in *Julius Cæsar* writes the word "adder," and this is the spelling in our latest MS., Harl. 2124.

In reading these plays I have been always on the look-out for distinctive Cheshire words. I have come to the conclusion, however, that to talk of a *Cheshire* dialect is a misnomer. We ought rather to speak of the *Northern* dialect, for we find that most Cheshire words are common to Lancashire, North Derbyshire, Yorkshire, Westmorland and Cumberland. I have made a practice for some years of jotting down local words wherever I have been, and my experience is that there is a large vocabulary common to all the above-mentioned counties. I do not claim to be an expert in the subject of local words, but so far I have only found one word in the Chester Mystery Plays which, as far as I know, can be called a Cheshire word. Noah takes "diggs" and drakes into the ark with him. "Diggs" is a Cheshire word for ducks. I have heard it in Wirral, and though now it is probably, like all things local in word and tradition and custom, fast dying out before the advance of a uniform education, it was at one time common in Cheshire.

The Banns.

Before the plays began a herald or some official "proclaimed the banes." This was a versified account of the

plays, their history, characters and the various town guilds performing each play. There are two forms of these " Banes," the older one in Morris's *Chester under the Plantagenets*,[1] and a late Protestant one printed by Ormerod. When the " Banes " were first introduced it is impossible to say, though it was probably at a rather late date, as the author (of the later version) is apologetic for the differences existing between his day and the time when the plays were first produced:

" Condempne not our matter where grosse wordes you here,
Which ymporte at this day small sense, or understandinge."

These " banes " are unique; none of the other cycles have them.

1. The Fall of Lucifer.

The first Pageant, that of the Fall of Lucifer, tells the story in the traditional manner. Lucifer, the greatest and fairest of the angels, falls because during God's absence (for note the stage instructions, " Tunc cantabunt et recedet Deus ") after having sworn fealty he sets himself up for worship. Certain of the angels acknowledge his claim. However, God returns and says:

" Say what aray doe you make here ?
Who is your Prince and principall ? . . . .
Lucifer, who set thee here, when I was goe ?
What have I offended unto thee ?
I made thee my frende, thou arte my foe !
Whie hast thou trespassed thus to me ?
Above all angels there were no mo
That sate so nighe the maiestye.
I charge you fall tyll I byd Noe !
To the pitt of hell, evermore to be ! "

One curious feature is that after their fall the fallen angels are not alluded to by name but are called Primus and Secundus Demon.

[1] The reference given for it is misprinted. It should be Harl. MS. 2150, f. 88 (261).

2. The Creation of Man.

To replenish the lost angels, God states His intention of creating fresh creatures—Man—and Satan aware, though we are not told how, of this purpose determines to avenge himself upon this new creature. This leads to the second pageant: The Creation of the World and Adam and Eve. These plays are continuous; one merges into the other The pageants must have followed one another quickly through the streets, one taking up the story very nearly where the other leaves it. The second play tells the story of the six days of Genesis. Adam is created, but until after the sleep in which Eve is formed from his rib, he does not speak a word. From the stage directions we gather that Adam rises when he is told to do so, but it is not until after his sleep that he has any words to utter, then he says:—

> " O Lorde, where have I longe bene ?
> For, sithe I slepte, much have I seen
> Wonders that, withoutten wene,
> Hereafter shall be wiste."

To which God replies:—

> " Rise up, Adam, and awake !
> Here have I formed thee a mate,
> Here to thee thou shalt take
> And name her as thy list."

Adam's next speech is curious:—

> " I see well, Lord, through thy grace,
> Bone of my bone thou her mase,
> And fleshe of my fleshe she hase,
> And my shape through Thy saw,
> Therefore shall she be called, I wis,
> Virago, nothing amisse,
> For out of man taken she is,
> And to man shall she draw."

It is that word *virago* to which I wish to draw attention. It is not used in its modern sense, viz., a termagant. The word is derived from the Latin *vir*; the root idea is man, and in Adam's mouth virago is evidently meant to express

the idea of the homogeneity of the two sexes, the man-woman. One meaning of the word, as defined by the dictionary, is "a masculine woman" but it is not often used in that sense to-day.

I have already alluded to the vexed question as to how this scene was performed; in other words, how realistic did they make it? And I have suggested that probably on the Continent they adhered to the stage directions, at least in the early days of their performance, and this may have given just cause to the objections raised in many quarters to them, and the efforts of the clergy to stop them. But in Chester, and probably throughout this country, I find no evidence of objectionable exhibitions, and I believe the stage directions were merely copied as a matter of course. Certainly they are explicit, as they follow the speech I have just quoted, and are:—

Tunc Adam et Eva stabunt nudi et non verecundabunt, et veniet serpens ad paradisum positum in specie demonis et ambulando dicat, etc.

All the stage directions are in Latin. The reason is not far to seek. The populace performed the plays, but those who directed them were the more learned members of the community, clerical or lay, and Latin was their language.

This play of the Creation also contains the incident of the slaying of Abel by Cain.

3. The Deluge.

The third play is that of the Deluge of Noah, performed most appropriately by the Water Drawers of the Dee.

This was perhaps the favourite play of all. It gave opportunity for the kind of horse-play, especially marital, which the people of the middle ages so much loved.

Noah is instructed by the Almighty to build a ship wherein he and his family may be secure during the coming flood.

" Therefore Noe, my servant free,
That righteous man art as I see,
A shippe sone thou shalt make the
Of trees drye and lighte."

His sons Shem, Ham and Japhet all assist in the work; his wife also lends a hand in carrying timber etc., as also do his sons' wives. When, however, the ark is built Noah's wife has changed her mind and will not enter it, and then the fun starts. Noah tells her to go into the ark but she refuses.

Noah: Good wife, doe now as I thee bydd.
Noah's Wife: By Christ! not or I see more neede
Though thou stand all day and stare.
Noah: Lord, that women be crabbed aye
And never are meke, that dare I saye.
This is well sene by me to daye,
In witness of yow each one.

The sons of Noah enumerate the various animals taken into the ark. One surmises that a cause of Noah's wife's objections to entering was the various animals collected together. For in a verse which may have been intended as humorous she says:

And here are beares, wolfes sett,
Apes, owles, marmoset,
Weesells, squirrels and firret;
Here they eaten their meate.

Time presses, so Noah once more bids his wife come into the ark " for feare lest that we drowne," to which she replies,

" Yea, sir, set up your sayle
And rowe forth with evill heale!
For, without any fayle
I will not out of this towne.
But I have my gossips everichon,
One foote further I will not gone;
They shall not drowne, by St. John,
And I may save their lyfe.
They loved me full well, by Christ;
But thou wilt let them in thy chist;

Els rowe forth, Noe, whether thou list,
And get thee a new wife.

Noah: Sem, sonne, loe, thy mother is wraw;
For sooth such another I do not know.

Shem: Father, I shall fett her in, I trow,
Without any fayle.
Mother, my father after thee send,
And bydds thee into yonder ship wend,
Loke up and see the wynde,
For we be readye to sayle.

However, Noah's wife still continues to drink with her "gossopes" and will not move until Shem forcibly pulls her into the ark, where Noah welcomes her with,

Welcome, wife into this boate.

To which she answers,

And have thou that for thy note!

and gives him a clout on the head, which brings from him the exclamation:

A! ha! mary, this is hote!
It is good to be still.

We can imagine the gusto with which these scenes would be welcomed by the populace.

The dispute between Noah and his wife is only found in the Towneley and Chester Plays, but probably it was one of these to which Chaucer alludes in the Miller's Tale, where he speaks of

The sorwe of Noe with his felawship
Or that he mighte get his wif to ship.

There is in the last verse of this play a very interesting allusion to the rainbow. In giving His promise that the earth should never be destroyed again by flood, God says:—

"Where cloudes in the welkin bene,
That ilke bow shall be sene
In tokeninge that my wrath and tene
Shall never this wroken be.

The stringe is turned toward you
And toward me is bent the bowe
That such wedder shall never showe,
And this behett I thee."

Now that was written in the days when archery was in vogue. To turn the string of the bow towards anyone was a sign of peace, or at least that the person holding the bow was not intending to use it for offensive purposes. Further the bow mentioned in this respect was the long-bow: obviously it was not the cross-bow. From this we gather that the date of the authorship of this play is some time later than *circa* 1300, because prior to that date the cross-bow was largely in use.

4. The Offering up of Isaac.

The fourth play is the Sacrifice of Isaac, performed by the Barbers. This play differs from all the others in one respect, viz., that it is introduced by a character not appearing again. In the 1592 MS. he is called *Preco*, and in that of 1607, which I quote, *Nuntius*:—

All peace, Lordinges, that be present,
And herken now with good intent.
Now Noe away from us is went
And all his Companye;
And Abraham through God's grace,
He is comen into this place,
And you will geue him rowme and space
To tell you of Storye.

It is evident there has been a break of some kind in the procession of the pageants and the messenger or preacher is introduced to pick up the thread. I suggest—it is merely a suggestion—that there has been what to-day we should call an interval. Probably there were such intervals during the day, though the question at once arises, why have none of the other plays the same kind of introduction?

This play begins by introducing Abraham, Lot and Melchizedek. Abraham and Melchizedek exchange

presents. In receiving Abraham's present, Melchizedek says:—

> And your present, Sir, take I,
> And honour it devoutelye,
> For much good yt may signefie
> In tyme that is cominge.
> Therefore, horse, harnes and perye
> As falles for my dignitie,
> The tythe of yt I take of thee,
> And receave thy offeringe.

Lot also makes an offering. Then another character steps in called *Expositor*. I quote the last two verses of his speech, which I think have great significance:—

> By Abraham understand I may,
> The father of Heaven in good faye;
> Melchisadech a priest to his paye
> To minister that sacrament
> That Christ ordayned on Sherethursday,
> In bread and wyne, to honur him aye;
> This signifieth, the south to saye,
> Melchisadech's present.

Now the purport of all this is evidently to impress the listeners with the fact that Melchizedek was both priest and king, and throws much light on the date of this passage, which I venture to assert was put in some time after Henry VIII, had thrown off his allegiance to Rome and become the head of the English Church. The question which *Expositor* is discussing is the question of tithes. After the break with Rome there arose some confusion as to who was the rightful person to receive tithes, and unless I read this passage wrongly it is an assertion that the king in his dual office of priest and king has a right to them.

The verses recording the Sacrifice of Isaac are among some of the best in the whole of the plays. The broken-hearted father doing what he conceives to be the will of God and the son obedient unto death. The whole passage is full of a very human pathos—which never sinks

into bathos. It bears also in the style marks of great antiquity.

I believe that this scene as we read it here has not been much altered from the earliest days of Mystery Plays. When they arrive at the hill of sacrifice, Isaac asks:—

Father, tell me, or I goe,
Whether I shall have harme or noe.

Abraham: Ah, dere God, that me is woe!
Thou bursts my hart in sunder.

Isaac: Father, tell me of this case,
Why you your sword drawen hase,
And beare yt naked in this place;
Therefore I have great wonder.

Abraham: Isaac, sonne, peace! I pray thee,
Thou breakes my harte even in three.

Isaac: I praye you, father, leane nothing from me,
But tell me what you thinke.

Abraham: O Isaac, Isaac, I must thee kill,
O my sonne, I am sory
To doe to thie this great anye;
God's Comaundment do must I,
His workes are ay full mylde.

Isaac: Wold God, my mother were here with me!
She wolde knele upon her knee,
Praying you, father, if it might be,
For to save my life.

Abraham: O Comelie Creature, but I thee kill
I greeve my God and that full ill;
I may not worke against his will,
But ever obedyent be.
O Isaac, sonne, to thee I saye:
God has commanded me this daye
Sacrifice—this is no naye—
To make of thy boddye.

Isaac: Is it God's will I should be slaine?

On being told that it is, the boy replies:—

Father, at home your sonnes you shall finde
That you must love by course of kinde,
Be I once out of your mynde,
Your sorrow may sone cease;

But you must doe God's bydding.
Father, tell my mother for nothing.

Isaac asks for his father's blessing:—

Father, sith you must needs doe soe,
Let it passe lightlie and overgoe,
Kneling on my knees two
Your blessing on me spreade !

Abraham: My blessing, deere sonne, give I the
And thy mother's with hart so free;
The blessing of the Trynitie,
My deare sonne, on the lighte !

Abraham cannot bring himself to do the deed and goes on talking and lamenting, one suspects to put off the evil stroke as long as possible, until at last in a rather quaint speech Isaac tells him to hurry up:—

O deare father, doe awaye
Your making so mickle mone !
Now truly, father, this talking
Doth but make long tarying:
I praye you, come and make ending,
And let me hence gone !

After some more lamenting on the part of the father he prepares to strike the fatal blow and Isaac offers up his soul to God:—

Nowe, father, I se that I shall die.
Almightie God in maiestie,
My soule I offer unto thee;
Lord to yt be kinde.

Then come the stage instructions: "Tunc accipiet Gladium, faciens occidendi signum, et Angelus veniens capiet punctum gladii, ac postea dicat Angelus:"

Abraham, my servant deere !
Laie not thy sword in no maner
On Isaac, they deare derling !

The play closes with the words of *Expositor*:—

By Abraham I may understand
The Father of Heaven, that can fand
With his sonne's blood to break that band
The Devil had brought us too.

By Isaac understand I may
Jhesu that was obedyent aye,
His father's will to worke alway
His death to underfonge.

This play in its pure human feeling and sentiment touches the high-water mark. I do not think we have anything in the same line to equal it in English literature until that scene in *King John* where Arthur pleads for his eyes.

5. Balaam and Balak.

The fifth play is that of Balaam and Balak. This is unique in the Chester Plays; it does not occur in any of the other English cycles, though it is to be found in the French mysteries.

This play seems to me the most difficult of all. Some parts of it make me think that the date of it is very late, but again there are things in it which warrant us in thinking that it is a very early production. My own opinion is that we must place the date of its composition very early, but that it has been considerably altered, and parts of it are post-reformation. We have that character whom I always suspect to be a late introduction, *Expositor*, butting in with quite unnecessary expositions. It is the most didactic of the series. It does more than point a moral and adorn a tale, it hits you in the eye with the moral every minute. It lacks dramatic incident, with the exception of the angel who bars the prophet's way, and as the stage directions say: "Tunc Angelus obuiabit Balaam cum gladio extracto in manu, et stabit asina."

I have sometimes wondered if the play was inserted into the Chester Mysteries as a sort of set-off to the Feast of the Ass. Although I can find no reference in any history of Chester to this celebration I have no doubt the Feast of the Ass was enacted in Chester, and if this play was inserted into the Chester cycle at some post-reformation date—and I may say again that our oldest MS.

is 1591, and that we have no means of knowing whether this document represents the plays as they came from the hand of Ranulph Higden, or whoever their author may have been; therefore it is impossible to say what is the date of any particular play—then it may have been a concession to the populace for the loss of an old custom. I have already pointed out how some passages in this play are almost translations from the French, and this fits in with the theory that it was adapted at a late date and for a particular purpose. It is worth also remarking that it is in this play that we have the first mention of Mohammed, a name we shall frequently come across later in these mysteries and about which I shall have more to say, because I have a theory that some passages may be dated by this reference. The Festival of the Ass originated in Constantinople, being instituted by the Patriarch Theophylact, who hoped by its means to supersede the old pagan festival in commemoration of Vesta being saved from violence by the braying of an ass. This festival had become a wild orgy and Theophylact hoped to turn it into a Christian feast; but as ever happens in such cases the Christian ceremony degenerated into something very like the pagan, and in the middle ages the 14th January—the Feast of the Ass—had become an unholy day of licence. It may be pure accident that Mohammed is introduced into this play, in which, as in the festival at Constantinople, the ass is really the most noted feature, or it may be intentional. I merely make the suggestion, and indeed in these old mysteries one can do no more, for we are all very much in the dark, and struggling to follow a gleam of light here and there, but the trouble is that many of these gleams turn out to be Will o' the Wisps.

This play opens with a kind of rhymed version of the Ten Commandments—only they are not all there. Then after speeches, the purport of which it is sometimes

difficult to follow, we come to the story of Balaam and Balak. It follows very closely that recorded in the 22nd and 23rd chapters of the Book of Numbers and does not call for much notice. There are only two points which have not a scriptural foundation. Balaam's ass is called Burnell. I shall be very grateful for any light thrown on that name for I am utterly at a loss to trace its origin or significance. The other point is that Balak swears in a most unscriptural manner. He greets the Prophet with:—

> What the Devilles ! eyles the poplart ?

The rest of the play is composed of speeches by Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Jonas, David, Joel, Micah and *Expositor*. The play ends with the words of Balak, who has evidently had enough of it:—

> Goe we forth ! it is no boote
> Longer with this man to moote;
> For God of Jewes is crop and roote,
> And Lord of Heaven and Hell.
> Now see I well no man on lyve,
> Gaynes with him for to stryve,
> Therefore here, as mot I thryve !
> I will no longer dwell.

6. The Nativity.

The sixth play is that of the Nativity, played by the Wrights.

It begins in orthodox fashion with the annunciation of the angel Gabriel:—

> Haile be thou, Mary, maiden free,
> Full of grace, God is with thee.
> Among all women blessed thou be,
> And the fruite of thy bodye !

But the story as it develops is not that of the synoptic Gospels, and readers not acquainted with the uncanonical books are likely to wonder on what this story of the Nativity is based. In order to obtain the origins and

atmosphere of the play I will quote a few verses from the *Protevangelion*. This gospel was attributed to James the Less.

And it came to pass, that there went forth a decree from the Emperor Augustus, that all the Jews should be taxed, who were of Bethlehem in Judea. And Joseph said, 'I will take care that my children be taxed: but what shall I do with this young woman? To have her taxed as my wife I am ashamed: and if I tax her as my daughter, all Israel knows she is not my daughter.'

And he saddled the ass and put her upon it, and Joseph and Simon followed after her and arrived at Bethlehem within three miles, and he found there a cave and let her into it.

And leaving her and his sons in the cave, Joseph went forth to seek a Hebrew midwife in the village of Bethlehem.

Then I beheld a woman coming down from the mountains and she said to me, 'Where art thou going, O man?'

And I said to her, 'I go to enquire for a Hebrew midwife.'

She replied to me, 'Where is the woman that is to be delivered?' And I answered, 'In the cave and she is betrothed to me.'

Then said the midwife, 'Is she not thy wife?'

Joseph answered, 'It is Mary, who was educated in the Holy of Holies, in the house of the Lord, and she fell to me by lot and is not my wife, but has conceived by the Holy Ghost.'

The midwife said, 'Is this true?'

He answered, 'Come and see.'

And the midwife went along with him and stood in the cave.

Then a bright cloud overshadowed the cave and the midwife said, 'This day my soul is magnified, for mine eyes have seen surprising things and salvation is brought forth to Israel.'

But on a sudden the cloud became a great light in the cave so that their eyes could not bear it. But the light gradually decreased, until the infant appeared and suckled the breast of his mother Mary.

Then the midwife cried out, and said, 'How glorious a day is this, wherein mine eyes have seen this extraordinary sight!'

And the midwife went out of the cave and Salome met her. And the midwife said to her, 'Salome, Salome, I will tell you a most surprising thing which I saw. A virgin has brought forth, which is a thing contrary to nature.'

Salome refuses to believe; she is convinced, however, as we are told in a verse which I prefer not to quote, but

is punished for her unbelief by a withered hand. She makes supplication for her hand to be restored.

Upon this the angel of the Lord stood by Salome and said 'The Lord God hath heard thy prayer; reach forth thy hand to the child and carry him and by that means thou shalt be restored.'

Salome, filled with exceeding joy, went to the child and said, 'I will touch him.' And she purposed to worship him: for she said, 'This is a great king which is born in Israel.'

And straightway Salome was cured.

All this, with much more from kindred sources, is found in this play of the Nativity.

To return to the mystery. Like the Greek dramatists the writers of these plays did not bother about what to-day we are so particular about, the unities of time and place.

In the Greek drama, if a person is wanted or wished for, though he may be supposed to be at the other end of the earth, he immediately appears. It is the same in these Chester mysteries. Immediately after Gabriel's visit, Elizabeth appears. Mary greets her with,

"Elizabeth, Neece, God the see!"

The form of the salutation is out of the ordinary, and it would be interesting to know if such a form occurs anywhere else.

Mary and Elizabeth go to Joseph, and now occurs one of those curious turns of thought common in the middle ages but quite foreign to moderns. It appears that Joseph was not aware of Mary's condition and when he sees her he is distressed to know who is responsible. Bear in mind that it is only a few moments since the Annunciation and already the birth is near at hand. We are not concerned here merely with a disregard of the unities of time and place, but with an idea and a fundamental, what I may call the Immediate Conception.

In his lamentation, Joseph gives voice to the old and ever new tragedy of age and youth:

" God, let never an old man take him a yonge woman,
Nor set his hart her upon lest he beguiled be !
For accord there may be none.
Nor they may never be at one,
And that is seene in many one,
As well as on me."

As in the New Testament version, he is minded to put Mary away from him, but is warned by the Angel not to do so, for the Child

" Of the Holy Ghost begotten is."

We are now introduced to Caesar Augustus, who (under the name of Octavian) struts on, and, after a good deal of proclaiming his power and might, announces his decree that all the world should be taxed. The first part of Octavian's speech bears evidence of the French origin of the passage; not only is part of it in French but the whole tone is decidedly foreign; yet in the very middle of it comes one of the first local allusions to be noticed—a reference to Boughton. When he has finished his commands he says to the attendant who is to carry his orders:

" Have done, boye, art thou not bowne ? " (going)

to which he gets the reply,

" All ready, my lord, my Mahound !
No talls tupp in all this towne
Shall go further without faile ! "

Octavian replies,

" Boye, therefore by my Crowne,
Thou must have thy warison (reward).
The highe horse besides Boughton
Take thou for thy travayle."

I venture to suggest that the horse of Boughton may be a joking allusion to the imitation head of a horse which was sometimes carried by the soulers on All Souls' Day in some Cheshire towns. I have not been able to trace the custom at Boughton itself, but at Nantwich and Tarporley the horse's head was used by the soulers. I am

utterly at a loss to explain the allusion in any other manner. It is of interest to note in this connection that the township of Great Boughton was in the possession of the monks of St. Werburgh.

Whatever the horse of Boughton may have been it was declined, so the messenger is told,

> Boye, their be Ladies many one ;
> Among them all chose thee one,
> Take the fayrest or els none
> And freely I geve her thee.

One can imagine Octavian—perhaps a lusty wright—waving his arm over the crowded street as he uttered the words, and I suspect that this offer was not refused and probably some Chester matron or maiden had to submit to a little pleasantry.

Joseph's utterances about the tribute read almost like a passage out of Piers Plowman:

> A ! lord ! what doth this man now here ?
> Poore mens waile is ever in weere,
> I wot by this bosters bere
> That trybute I must paye.
> And for great age and power
> I wan no good this seaven yeare
> Now comes the Kinge's messenger
> To get all that he maye.
> A! leefe Sir, tell me, I thee praye;
> Shall poore as well as rich paye ?

Arrived at Bethlehem, Joseph goes out to search for two midwives. He finds two, by name Lebell and Salome.

The story of the birth, of Salome's disbelief of Mary's virginity, of the withering of her hand and of its healing follow the apocryphal gospel, as already stated.

7. The Shepherds.

The seventh play, the Adoration of the Shepherds, is one of the most important in the whole cycle, because it is of all the plays the one in which local traditions, customs

and ideas receive the freest expression. Although in conception this is one of the oldest plays, in our Chester series, as also in the Towneley, it is the one in which the native life finds its greatest expression. It is curious that the York and Coventry plays of the Shepherds are among the shortest and least interesting in their respective cycles. One can understand why the Coventry one should be so, for Warwickshire is not a sheep-farming district; but why is the York one so poor? The Towneley play is magnificent, and Wakefield and York are not so far apart.

Although Cheshire to-day is not a sheep-rearing county probably in the past it was. Be that as it may, the play we are now considering was evidently one to which much attention was given in the days of the mystery plays.

The first Shepherd enters and says:—

> On wouldes have I walked full wylde,
> Under busks my bower to buylde,
> From Stif stormes my sheepe to sheild,
> My semely wedders to save;
> From comlie Conway unto Clyde,
> Under Tildes them to hyde,
> A better shepherd on no side
> No earthlie man may have.

He then goes on to enumerate the various diseases to which sheep are liable and the remedies to be applied. I understand that these remedies are still used by Cheshire farmers. A second shepherd comes along and the two agree that if only the third man were come, "Tuch Tibbs sonne," they could proceed to a meal. They call him and of course he at once appears. They then proceed to turn out what each has brought for supper. The second man:—

> Here is bread this day was baken,
> Onyons, garlick and lyckes,
> Butter that bought was in Blacon,
> And green cheese that will grease your cheekes.

The third man:—

> And here ale of Halton I have,
> And what meat I had to my hyre;
> A pudding maye no man deprave
> And a Janock of Lancashyre.
> Lo ! here a sheepe's head soused in ale,
> And a groyne to lay on the grene,
> And soure mylke my wife had on sale:
> A noble supper as well is seene.

I need not say that Janock was a special Lancashire dish, and that the word has passed into the Lancashire dialect as synonymous for genuine or good.

The first shepherd then announces what he has in his sack:

> A pigg's foote I have here, pardye !
> And a panch cloute in my packe.
> A womb clout, fellows, now have I,
> A lyver as it is no lack.
> A chitterling boyled shall be.
> This burden I beare on my backe.

It is interesting to compare this feast with the menu of the shepherds in the Towneley play. They sit down to:—

A boar's brawn,	an ox tail,	a goose's leg,
a cow's foot,	a pie,	pork,
a sow's shank,	two swine's jaws,	partridge tart,
blood puddings,	part of a hare,	calf liver.

There are two items in this list which are local, viz.; the boar's brawn and the partridge pie. The rest of the edibles might be easily interchanged. The goodly feast provided is conclusive evidence that both these plays were written before the Black Death (1349) had devasted the land. There is certainly no suggestion of poverty, although in the Towneley play there is a little talk of hard times, but it is probably nothing more than the grumblings for which the agriculturist and farmer have always been noted.

After supper there is a wrestling bout, which at one time looks as though it might have serious consequences;

however the appearance of the star puts a stop to all the horse-play.

What is all this light here
That shynes so bright here
On my blacke bearde ?
For to see this sight here
A man may be afright here
For I am aferde.

The frightened shepherds kneel in prayer. Over them there rings out the angel chorus:—"Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis."

They determine to go to Bethlehem and on arriving there pay homage to the Child.

They are very much amused at Joseph. Says the first shepherd:—

What ever this olde man, that heare is,
Take heede howe his head is hore,
His beard like a buske of breeres
With a pownd of heare about his mouth and more.

It is curious that in mediæval art Joseph is always represented as an old and decrepit man, and such we find him all through these plays. The object was to emphasize the fact that he was *not* the father of Mary's child.

After doing homage the shepherds present their gifts.

First Shepherd:—

Haile, King borne in a mayden's bowre !
Prophets did tell thou shold be our succour.
Loe ! I bring the a bell;
I praie thee, save me from hell,
So that I may with thee dwell
And fare well for aye.

Second Shepherd:—

Hayle the, maker of the Star,
That stood us beforne !
Haile the, blessed full barne !
I bring the a flackett !
And thereat hanges a spone
To eate thy potage with all at none,

As I my selfe full oft hath done.
With hast I pray: take it.

Third Shepherd:—

Hayle, graunter of hoppe!
In earth now thou dwelles.
Loe! sonne, I bring the a cupp,
For I have nothing els.

There has come with the shepherds a certain *Gartius* who had joined them before the wrestling match, and he also makes an offering:—

To save me from all ill sickness,
I offer to thee a paire of my wyve's olde hose.

The shepherds are so impressed that they determine to give up keeping sheep and become messengers of the new evangel. Two decide to become itinerant preachers and two to become hermits. In the Towneley plays there is no mention of such a change in the shepherds' lives, and probably it was the influence of the abbey at Chester which was responsible for this unexpected dénouement.

It is interesting to compare the Chester plays with the Towneley. In the latter cycle there are two plays. Originally there was probably only one—as in the Chester cycle—but in course of time so much was added that it became divided into two. By far the greater portion is taken up by the shepherds' affairs and quarrels and by the story of the stolen sheep. The song of angels and the visit to Bethlehem have only short notice at the end of each play. All through the religious element is far less marked than in our play.

I have already stated that our Chester plays are the most didactic of all the cycles, and nowhere is this more marked than in the Shepherds' play. While there is much of local colour and topical interest, at the same time the religious significance is kept well in view. In the Towneley it is almost lost, and we have not so much an idyll of the Nativity as a pastoral idyll. Of course from the

point of view of the antiquary and historian this gives greater value to the Towneley plays.

The questions arise, Did Chester and Wakefield borrow from one another, and which of the two represents the earlier tradition of the mysteries? As to the latter, I have little hesitation in answering—The Chester Play. These mysteries are essentially religious in conception. They began in the church and it was only as they travelled away from their source that they began to develop the secular and topical themes. Therefore it is always safe to assume that the more didactic and scriptural play is the earlier. Of course by the time of our MSS. they had all wandered from their original form. It is only a question of degree; the Chester had not become so much secularised as the Towneley.

The other question to decide is, Was there any interchange of ideas between the two? I cannot find any influence of the Chester play in the Towneley, but there are traces of the influence of the Towneley upon the Chester. Probably the latter owed to the former the introduction of the secondary characters such as *Gartius*. This name may be a variant of the Towneley name of a similar person —Jak Garcio. There is one line which is hard to account for except on the assumption that it was borrowed either from the Towneley or some other plays with an East Coast setting. When the shepherds are parting, one says of the other:—

> From London to Louth,
> Such an other shepherd I wot not where is.

Now the phrase "London to Louth" would suggest nothing to a Cheshire man. It had been brought home by someone who had seen mysteries performed elsewhere, and if he brought the phrase he probably brought some other ideas as well.

Just as the Towneley cycle has two shepherds' plays, so the Chester cycle has two Magi plays, nos. 8 and 9. But

this is not the case of one play growing into two, it is rather that in the Towneley series the two have been merged into one.

8, 9. Herod and the Wise Men.

The first play, the Adoration of the Magi, is really a Herod play. Herod seems to have caught the imagination of the people of the middle ages. He appears to have been the most popular of all the characters in the mysteries. He is always represented as a swaggering, shouting braggart; this probably accounted for his popularity.

The three kings, led by the star, come to the court of Herod. When he learns of their mission he breaks out into a typical Herodian speech:—

> For I am king of all mankinde,
> I byd, I beat, I loose, I bynde,
> I maister the Noone; take this in mynde
> That I am most of mighte.
> I am the greatest above degree,
> That is or was or ever shall be.
> The sonne it dare not shyne on me
> If I byd hym goe downe;
> No rayne to fall shall none be free,
> Nor no Lord have that liberty
> That dare abide, and I bid flee,
> But I shall cracke his crowne;

Then drawing his sword proceeds:—

> What the Devill shold this be!
> A boy, a groome of low degree,
> Should raigne above my Roialtie,
> And make me but a goose!

He bids his *Doctor* read him the prophecies concerning the birth of the Messiah. Then follows a long recitation of them from the Scriptures. I do not know what to make of this section. It is in a different metre—one apparently much later than the main portion—and yet one cannot believe it to be of much later date than that of the plays generally, for in conception it bears evidence of antiquity.

It is far too daring for the 16th and 17th centuries. It bears the stamp of what has been called the Age of Faith, which because it was the Age of Faith could dare more than could an age of doubt. My own opinion is that the substance of this section is as old as anything in these plays, but that a later and scholarly hand recast it into the somewhat stately measure in which we find it.

Herod dismisses the kings and bids them return when they have found the child. Then he breaks out in a rage again, in a passage which must have given great delight to his audience:—

> By cockes soule ! come they againe,
> All three traytors shall be slayne,
> And that ilke swedling swayne
> I shall swap off his head.

The second of the plays, the Oblation of the Magi, presents many similarities to the shepherds' oblation and many differences from it. It has not the spontaneity of the latter; it is more conventional. It keeps more to the Senecan tradition of the impressiveness of the presence of the great; although, and it is characteristic of these mystery plays, the spirit of fun will out even on the most sacred occasion. The second king when presenting his gift of incense exclaims:—

> And I will offer through God's grace,
> Incense, that nobler savour mase;
> Stench of the stable it shall wast,
> There as they be lent.

Mediæval stables were probably very like Eastern caravansera in at least one respect.

As to the shepherds so to the Magi, Mary offers thanks for the gifts, and Joseph (the kings, like the shepherds, speak of him as an old man) repeats his story of Mary's virginity. The kings take a most kingly farewell of one another and return home, but not through the country of Herod.

10. The Innocents.

The tenth play, the Slaying of the Innocents, performed by the Goldsmiths, would be undoubtedly one of the most dramatic of the series. It is full of action and would give plenty of opportunity for the kind of horse-play beloved in the middle ages. Herod begins it with his usual boasting utterance:

> Say no man anythinge is his,
> But only at my devyce,
> For all this world under me lyes
> To spare and else to spill.

The last four lines of the second verse afford one of the most considerable divergences between two of the MSS. that I know of.

In the Harleian MS. of 1607, the one which is used for the English Text Society's edition which I am quoting, the lines are (Herod is speaking of the Child Jesus):—

> For leeves all this, without let,
> That I will doe as I have het:
> *Mar* that misbegotten marmoset,
> That thinks to mar me.

In the earliest MS., that of 1591, the word *mar* in the third line reads *Marye*, which gives quite a different significance. In the first instance the imprecation is levelled against the Child Jesus, in the second against his mother Mary. There can be little doubt that *Mar* is the correct word; first because if we reade *Marye* the line lacks a verb and there is no statement of what Herod intends to do; secondly the use of the word *mar* in the fourth line suggests a certain play upon the word as well as affording an instance of alliteration. All the MSS. we possess are undoubtedly copied from earlier ones, and it is possible that whoever was responsible for the introduction of the Virgin's name was actuated by anti-Mariolatry and that the later copier, free from religious prejudice, restored the correct word and sense. I hope nobody will

think that when Herod called the Child " a misbegotten marmoset " he was calling him a misbegotten monkey. *Marmouset* is the French for those grotesque figures one often sees beside old fountains, and when one recalls some of these figures which are frequent in the market places of Continental towns, one is inclined to think that monkey might have been a less objectionable comparison.

When Herod finds that the Magi do not return, he realises that he has lost the opportunity of discovering the Child and decides on the massacre of all the young children in Bethlehem so as to make sure of killing the Child Jesus. For this purpose he calls his knights together. The two first mentioned are Sir Grimbalde and Sir Launcher. It is a far cry from Avalon to Syria, but that was a detail which these old writers did not consider, and they were wise, for the knights of the Round Table were sure to be popular anywhere on the western coasts of England. Herod informs them of what is required of them, namely the slaughter of the Innocents. To our pleased surprise they object to the mission, as it would shame them. But we are soon undeceived about any moral scruples they might have had. Their objection turns out to be, that the killing of a few children is beneath their dignity. When Herod informs them that they may slay " a thousand and yet moe," they consent at once; such an orgy of slaughter is quite worth while, and one of them boasts that:—

> Though the Kinge of Scotis and all his host
> Were here, I set not by their bost,
> To drive them downe by deene.

They set off for Bethlehem and of course arrive there in a very short time. It is never far in these mystery plays from any place in the world to any other.

Meanwhile Joseph has been warned by the angel to depart into Egypt, and so although Herod's men know it not, the birds have flown. Arrived at Bethlehem the

fun starts in a true mediæval manner. There is a great slaughter of infants, but the soldiers do not have it all their own way. The women of that city seem to have been of Amazonian breed and the men at arms were severely cudgelled. The mothers defended their children stoutly. Says one woman to a soldier,

> Be thou so hardy, I behet,
> To handle my sonne that is so sweete,
> This distaff and thy head shall meete,
> Or we be hethen gone.

Herod's men had in fact a very bad time of it. We can imagine with what delight the populace of Chester would watch this contest, and probably in the early days of the representations it lost nothing of its zest from the fact that some of the onlookers may have witnessed scenes somewhat similar between mail-clad knights and sturdy peasants.

The fray is brought to an end by a dramatic and unexpected incident. A child is slain, and the woman cries out that it was not her child but one given to her to nurse, and that the slain infant was the king's son, and she rushes off to inform Herod of what has happened:—

> Loe ! lord, loke and see !
> The child thou toke to me,
> Men of thy owne meny
> Have slayn it . . . . . .

Herod replies,

> Fye, hore, fye ! God give the pyne !
> Why didst thou not say that child was myne ?
> But it is vengeance, as drink I wyne,
> And that is now well sene,
> What the Devill, is this to say ?
> Why were thy witts so away ?
> Could thou not speak ? Could thou not pray,
> And say it was my sonne ?

The tradition of the slaughter of Herod's son along with the other children is found in the Golden Legend.

When we find an incident unfamiliar to-day, we may be sure that it was known when the plays were written or acted, for there is no evidence that the writers invented in the sense in which dramatists and novelists do in our age. They wove into their plays the traditions, superstitions and legends of their time, but there is no trace of their inventing incidents about their heroes.

Before leaving this scene there is a possible time reference to be noticed. One of the women who is inciting to the attack on the soldiers says:—

> " Their basenetes be big and broad."

Of course one cannot be quite sure what is meant by " big and broad "; if we could be we might be able to date this passage. From a careful examination of helmets I think that the basinet worn at the end of the fourteenth century best answers to the description " big and broad."

Apparently the shock of his son's death is the cause of that of Herod, for this play ends with the passing of the king. He exclaims:

> " Alas ! what the devill ! is this to mone ?
> Alas ! my days be now done.
> I wott I must dye soone,
> For damned I must be.
> My legges rotten and my armes ;
> I have done so many harmes,
> That now I see of feendes swarmes
> From Hell cominge for me."

So Herod is carried off by a demon. In the speech of the demon there is an interesting touch which must have appealed to the audience; he says as he carries off Herod,

> " No more shall you Tapstars, by my lewty,
> That fills ther measures falsly,
> Shall bear this lord company;
> The gett none other grace."

One would be inclined to think that there might be more heinous sins than false measures, but in the days when there was no proper supervision of weights and measures, the populace suffered badly from fraud in the matter of short weight and measure. We find frequent references to this subject in mediæval literature and art; for example, the misericord in Ludlow church depicting the Devil carrying off an alewife for giving false measure.

This play ends with the return from Egypt of the Holy Family, recalled by the Angel. It is significant that Joseph calls Mary "sister." It looks as though the writer had in mind the other famous biblical instance of a man passing his wife off as sister when in Egypt.

II. The Purification.

The eleventh play is that of the Purification, played by the Blacksmiths. This is really two plays in one, though the extant MSS. show no sign of a division. The first part deals with the ceremony of the Purification, and the second with the Child Jesus discoursing in the Temple with the Doctors.

The question arises again, Were there originally two plays or one? Comparing the different cycles on this point, we find that the Coventry cycle has two plays, the Purification and Christ disputing in the Temple, but between them comes the Slaughter of the Innocents. Something has gone wrong here. Into the many difficult problems of these Coventry mysteries I cannot enter, but of one thing I am fairly confident, viz.: that they are made up of plays from various sources, and in this connection it is interesting to note that the theme of Christ disputing in the Temple is mainly that of Mary's virginity and as such might be regarded as a kind of Purification play.

Turning to the York cycle we find the play of Christ with the Doctors in the Temple divided into two scenes.

The first shows Joseph and Mary returning home discussing the wonderful events which they have witnessed in Jerusalem. But be it noted that there is no play in the cycle showing what these things were. The preceding act is the Massacre of the Innocents. Now though I would not like to affirm that the sequence in the mysteries is always what a modern dramatist would make it, yet one play did lead to another in a rough and ready way. Here there seems to be a gap, and the most credible explanation is that one play was for some reason dropped, and that this was the Purification. The first scene is short and is really only a prologue to the second, that of the Child in the Temple.

The Towneley cycle, and it alone, has two distinct plays on the two subjects. The conclusion seems warranted that in this case the Towneley has kept the earlier division and that the other cycles have merged these two into one.

There is one curious incident in our Chester play which is not found anywhere else, and the source of which has not been traced. When Simeon is reading the prophecy of the Messiah's birth, he thinks there must be some mistake in the word " virgin," so he rules it out in the book and writes " a good woman." When he looks at it again he finds that his alteration has been erased and the word " virgin " written in red. Again he rules out the offending word, only to find that his substitution " a good woman " has been overwritten with the word virgin in letters of gold. He then realises that this must be the hand of God and leaves it alone. It would be very interesting to know where this story came from.

There is one verse in this play which is almost identical in the Towneley and York plays. It is where Mary asks Joseph to go into the Temple and bring Jesus out from among the doctors. He replies:—

Mary, wife, thou wottes right well,
That I must all my travayle teene;
With men of might I can not mell,
That sittes so gay in furres fyne.

In the Towneley play we have:—

With men of myght can I not mell,
Then all my travell mon I tyne;
I can not with thaym, that wote ye well,
The are so gay in furrys fyne.

The York version is:—

With men of myght can I not mell,
Than all my travayle mon I tyne;
I can not with them, this wate thou well,
They are so gay in furres fyne.

Did one copy from the other? I think not. Rather they all copied from the same original and then went their various ways and altered to suit their local ideas, and so in the course of time the cycles became very different; but in this instance we have a tell-tale verse left to show there was a common origin.

This play of the Purification is the second one to be signed and dated: "James Miller, August, 1607."

12. The Temptation.

The Temptation is the twelfth play of the cycle, performed by the Butchers.

It begins with a soliloquy by Satan which is rather curious. He has a great deal of knowledge of Jesus; knows what kind of a man he is and who is his mother—but is quite unable to discover who his father is. This is quite in keeping with the mediæval conception of the devil. One of the most surprising things in that conception is the sharp limitations with which the evil one's power and knowledge are hedged about. Thus while he knows all about Mary and Jesus and the circumstances of the birth, he has no knowledge of Joseph.

But there is a sting in the tail of this compliment to the husband of the Virgin, for it suggests that if he was unknown to the devil he must have been of very little account indeed. All through, Joseph cuts a rather poor figure. It proves that these plays took their form before the rise of the cult of Joseph. Pope Sixtus (1471-1484) placed Joseph on the Roman Kalendar, and since that time there has been a tendency to give him a little more honour than was accorded to him in the earlier Church. Certainly Joseph is not much honoured in any of these mystery plays.

Like the preceding one, this play is really in two parts. The first scene is the Temptation of Christ. The second is the Woman taken in Adultery, and of the two the latter is far the better drama. How was it that such a good opportunity as the Temptation offered for making a great scene was missed? The devil as presented here is no monster; he is simply a cunning dialectician. One is bound to confess that this part of the play is very tame; there is no horse-play, no thunder or lightning; in fact it is a fine opportunity lost for a display of some of the things which would have appealed to an audience of the middle ages. It is no answer to say that it is because the play keeps closely to the scripture story of this incident; because these mysteries generally added to the scripture basis anything current in the thought of their day. Neither can we place this play as a late addition, because the language used marks it as early. I have not been able to discover when such words as Doseberd—a simpleton, deadlish—mortal, wemlesse—chaste, went out of current use in our literature, but certainly at a comparatively early date. Note further that this is the play of the Butchers, who are not generally a set of men content to play a tame part.

We are thus forced to one of two conclusions: either the text as we have it has come down from a very early date

with no alterations—in which case it represents a unique survival in an original form; or else our text is taken from an older MS. than most of the others. I have already said that the Chester mysteries in their present form cannot be regarded as always representing the actors' copies, but rather as a literary effort when the acting of them was extinct or nearly so. Therefore the play in the streets of Chester may have been rather different from the copy extant.

The second part is concerned with the Woman taken in Adultery. Although the second scene possesses a little more dramatic element than the first, it is still lacking in the things we find in the other plays. Again the scripture narrative is closely followed, but a point which is frequently missed in reading that narrative is brought out in the play. When after having delivered the verdict, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone," Jesus stoops down and writes on the ground, many people seem to miss the connection between that writing and the woman's accusers slinking away. Of course what Jesus wrote were the private sins of the bystanders. One of the Jews says:—

> What wrytes thou, Master? Now lett see!

He looks and exclaims:—

> But alas! that wo is me!
> Here no longer dare I be,
> For dread of worlds shame.

And he takes to his heels, or in the language of the stage instructions—Et fugiet, et postea dicat Pharisæus, i.e. a Pharisee who comes along:—

> Why fleest thou, fellow? by my fay,
> I will see sone and assay.
> Alas! that I were away,
> Farr behynde Fraunce!
> Stand thou, Sibbel, him besyde!
> No longer here I darr abyde,
> Against thee now for to chyde.

Stage directions as in previous case!

At the end of the scene *Expositor* steps in and informs us:—

> Nor eche one of them had grace
> To see theyr synnes in that place;
> Yet none of other wyser was,
> But his own eche man knew.

Which of course entirely misses the point of the story and clearly shows that *Expositor* is a late addition; probably very late indeed.

13. Two Miracles.

The thirteenth play is the Restoration of Sight to the Blind Man and the Raising of Lazarus, played by the Glovers.

It is interesting to compare our Chester play with the corresponding one in the other cycles with regard to its position. In the York, the sequence is no. 24, "Woman taken in Adultery: Lazarus." In the Coventry, no. 24 "Lazarus," preceded by the play "The Woman taken in Adultery." In the Towneley it is no. 31. What quite has happened to this Towneley play, misplaced at the end of the cycle and showing signs of having been badly mauled at some time, we cannot tell. In the York and Coventry, the Temptation is a separate play, while the Chester combines it with the Woman taken in Adultery, which in the York is part of the Lazarus play. The Coventry alone has a play for each of these subjects.

The first five verses of our Chester play are, I think, undoubtedly of a later date than the remainder. At the beginning is placed the well known verse: "Ego sum lux mundi; qui sequitur me, non ambulat in tenebris, sed habebit lumen vitae," and this forms a text for what follows. Some of these lines have a beauty and dignity equal to any in the whole cycle, and I do not know of any other passage in which the rhymes are so skilfully handled.

Because he loveth him above his creatures all,
As his treasure and darling most principall,
Man, I say agayne, which is his owne elect
Above all creatures, peculiarly select.

There is only one archaic spelling in those lines.

In the sixth verse occurs the only instance in our plays of an appeal to the public for alms. The boy leading the blind man says:—

If pitty may move your gentell hart,
Remember, good people, the pore and the blynd,
With your charitable almes this pore man to comfort,
That is your owne neighbour and of your owne kynde.

This raises the question, were collections ever made during the shows for charitable purposes? I can discover no trace of such a custom, but the evidence of this verse seems conclusive that something of the kind took place, and it is supported by the next verse, in which the blind man (Chelidonius) says:—

Your almes, good people, for charity
To me that am blynd and never did see,
Your neighbour, borne in this citty!
Helpe me or I goe hence.

If street collections were made, it would certainly be in the later years of these shows, and it is significant that it is immediately after the lines quoted above that a change takes place both in the metre and style. I believe that the play originally began with the verse immediately succeeding, in which the speaker is Peter:

Mayster, instruct us in this case,
Why this man blynd borne was.
Is it for his owne trespas
Or ells for his parentes?

The difference between this and the preceding lines is evident to the most casual reader. The spelling, not to mention the inversion in the second line, stamps them as belonging to an earlier period.

The story of the restoring of sight to the blind man is the same as the New Testament record, but it is put in very homely language, which adds zest to the drama. For example, his mother, when called before the rulers, exclaims:—

> For he hath age, his tale to tell,
> And his mother tonge to utter it well,
> Althoughe he could never buy nor sell;
> Let him speak, we desyre.

Enraged by the attitude of Jesus and Chelidonius, the Jews make an effort to stone Jesus, but He vanishes ("Tunc colligent lapides, et statim evanescet Jesus") much to their surprise. Immediately afterwards the scene is laid in Bethany and the speakers are Mary and Martha lamenting for the death of their brother, to whom comes Jesus. There is some confusion here: evidently verses have been misplaced, for a few verses later we have Jesus telling His disciples that they are going to Judæa because Lazarus is dead "and thyder will I."

It is worthy of note that in three out of the four great cycles of mysteries the subject of Lazarus is combined with some other. The Coventry series is the only one that has a drama entirely devoted to Lazarus. In the York plays it is combined with the Woman taken in Adultery: in the Chester with the Restoring of Sight to the Blind Man. It is true the Towneley is simply called—"Lazarus" but the last portion of it is a tirade against the vices of the world by the risen Lazarus, which may be part of some other play tacked on to the Towneley at some time, for it is in an entirely different metre.

It is possible that the following verse records a touch of experience of the dangers of the night in the middle ages:

> He offendeth not that goeth in light,
> But who so walketh about in night,
> He trespasseth all against the right;
> And light in him is none.

It is of course a rhymed version of John xi, 9, 10, but the third line suggests a little more than is found in the text.

We have a curious copyist's error in the next verse:—

> For Worldes light I am veray,
> And who so followeth me, Sooth to say,
> He may goe no Chester way,
> For light in him is dight![1]

We must not conclude that Chester "way" was particularly dark. The writer has put a *c* instead of a *t*, the word should be *thester*, meaning dark. The transcriber was evidently very much a Chester man!

The interview between Martha and Mary and Jesus is very touchingly rendered, though keeping close to the Gospel narration. What is not found in the Gospel is the speech of Lazarus after his resurrection:—

> A! lord, blessed most thou be!
> From death to lyfe hast thou raysed me
> Through thy mickle might.
> Lord, when I herd the voyce of thee,
> All Hell fayled of ther posty,
> So fast from them my soule can flee,
> All Devills were a frayd.

This is founded upon the apocryphal Acts of Pilate.

The play ends with the goodbye of Jesus to the sisters:—

> Have good day, my Deghters deer!
> Wherever you goe, farr or neer,
> My blessinge I geve you here.
> To Jerusalem I take the way.

14. Preliminaries of the Passion.

The fourteenth play, that of the Corvisars, is Christ's Visit to Simon the Leper.

This play contains five scenes and takes its name from the first one. We have:—

[1] Ready.

1. Jesus at the house of Simon.
2. The preparation for Christ's entry into Jerusalem.
3. Jesus in the Temple driving out the money changers.
4. Caiaphas, Annas and the Pharisees in consultation.
5. Judas arranging the Betrayal.

In all the scenes the Gospel story is closely followed. In the house of Simon the only departure from that narrative is in making the murmurings of Simon and Judas a dialogue; by so doing the dramatic effect is enhanced. All through the mystery plays it is noticeable that soliloquy is avoided; a character either addresses the audience directly or another player. The soliloquy characteristic of the Elizabethan drama had not yet arrived.

In the second scene, Peter and Philip are despatched to obtain the ass for the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The entry itself is not given, but it is foreshadowed in the conversation of the citizens and two boys. This is the first time the term *cives* occurs in these plays.

The next scene is Christ in the Temple turning out the Money Changers, described as *Primus* and *Secundus Mercator*. The first *Merchant* threatens to tell Caiaphas:—

> A, ha ! Jesu, wilt thou so ?
> This word, as ever mott I go,
> Shalbe rehearsed before mo,
> And Cayphas I shall tell.

Either this threat, or annoyance at the incident, determines Judas to betray his Master:—

> By deer God in Maiesty !
> I am as wroth as I may be,
> And some way I will wreak me,
> As sone as ever I may.

The fourth scene represents Caiaphas, Annas and the Pharisees discussing how they may destroy Jesus, and the final one introduces Judas with his offer to deliver Him to them. After the bargain has been fixed, Judas arranges to deliver Christ to them,

> On Fryday in the morninge.

15. The Betrayal.

The fifteenth play, that of the Bakers, is Christ's Betrayal.

It begins with the Last Supper and again the Gospel narrative is faithfully followed. As a specimen of the happy way in which the New Testament language is paraphrased I select Thomas' question, " Lord, we know not whither thou goest: and how can we know the way ? " This reads:—

> Lord, we wot not, in good fay,
> What maner a gate thou wilt assay;
> Tell us, that we know may
> That gate, and goe with thee.

In the Betrayal in Gethsemane, Malchus is an important personage. At first he is very offensive to Jesus, but after having his ear cut off by Peter and having had it restored by Christ, he changes his attitude:

> A ! well is me, well is me !
> My eare is healed, now I see.
> So merciful a man as is he,
> Knew I never non.

His companions, however, hurry Jesus away to Annas and Caiaphas.

16. The Passion.

The sixteenth play is Christ's Passion, played by the Bowyers, Fletchers and Ironmongers.

The first scene shows Jesus before Annas and Caiaphas, who are addressed as " Sir Bishopps." This scene follows closely the Gospel story. Full advantage is taken of all opportunity for horse play in the way of tormenting the prisoner. Annas says:—

> " Despyse him ! spurne and spitt !
> Let se, or you sytt,
> Who hath happ to hitt,
> That us thus harmed hase ! "

Some of the verses in this section are very coarse, but no doubt the whole scene went with much gusto. On

turning to some of the plates in Dürer's "Little Passion" (Die Kleine Passion) executed between 1509 and 1512—the three I refer to are those of "Jesus brought before Annas," "Jesus brought before Caiaphas" and "Mocked and Blindfolded"—a good idea of these scenes as enacted in the mysteries will be obtained. They suggest, indeed, that the artist was drawing from memory what he had seen, and the inference is that the incidents were taken from the mystery plays.

Brought before Pilate Jesus is soon sent on to Herod. Again the Gospel narrative is followed closely, and the Herod we meet here is a much tamer Herod than his father Herod, whom we have encountered previously. There is one utterance of Herod's that calls for note. When unable to get any reply from Jesus he determines to send him back to Pilate, and says:—

> "Cloth him in whyte for this case,
> To Pilate it may be solace."
> For Jews' custom before was,
> So to cloth men that be wodd.

Wodd of course means *mad*.

Back again before Pilate, the procurator tries hard to save Jesus, but with what result we know. Whoever wrote this play was no mean dramatist, for while the Gospel narrative is paraphrased he somehow manages to make the words spoken by each character a revelation of the person speaking and on the stage the effect must have been very realistic.

The story of the Passion must have been brought home to the multitudes in a way that has never been done by post-reformation methods.

For the scene of the scourging and crowning reference may again be made to Dürer's plates, which might have been drawn to illustrate these passages. So far there has been little divergence from the Gospel story, but from now on other sources are drawn upon. Simon is

made more of than in the biblical account. He objects to carrying the cross:—

> " Alas ! that ever I hither come !
> Would God I hadd bene in Rome,
> When I the way hither nome,
> Thus to be anoyed !
> But lord I take to witness
> That I do this by distress.
> All Jewes for this falcenes
> I hope will be destroyed ! "

Annas, however, soon makes him take up the cross.

The dispute over the clothes and the dice-throwing take place before the crucifixion and Caiaphas has to order the men to get on with their work. It is curious to note that the Romans are not mentioned: it is apparently all the work of the Jews. When they come to nail Jesus to the cross they find that he is " short armed." The holes for the nails would be bored beforehand, and the phrase means that they find that Christ's hands will not reach them because the arms are too short. Dr. Philip Nelson informs me that the origin of this tradition is to be found in the Revelation of the Virgin to St. Bridget of Sweden. The story is found in other mystery plays besides ours, so it was evidently a popular tradition.

The words of the Virgin at the foot of the cross have a tragic beauty—a true Stabat Mater Dolorosa. Jesus commends her to John with the words:—

> " And to the, woman, also I say:
> Ther thy sonne thou se may,
> That clean virgin hase bene aye,
> Lyke as thy self is."

The reference to John is based upon the tradition that he never married but was from youth dedicated to high service. You will find the full story at the end of the apocryphal gospel, " Acts of John." It is rather doubtful whether Mary's reply is addressed to Jesus or to John.

" Alas ! my hart will break in three !
Alas ! Death, I conjure thee !
My lyfe, sonne, thou take from me,
And turn me from this woe ! "

The inference is that she is addressing her Divine Son, but judging from the context these words may have been spoken to John—her adopted son.

We have of course the story of St. Longinus, the centurion who pierced the side of Christ with his spear. This legend is almost as old as the Christian Church. Longinus was blind until upon the blood from Christ's wound falling upon his eyes he recovered his sight and became from that day a convert to Christianity—the first from the gentile world, ultimately suffering martyrdom at Caesarea some twenty years later. Christian art has frequently confused him with the centurion who uttered the words, " Truly this man was the Son of God," but that was spoken by the centurion in charge and he would not be a blind man. In both the York and Towneley plays this confusion exists, but our Chester play is here superior, for the two characters are distinct. The scene closes with Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus preparing the body for burial.

Though unsigned this play is dated Julii 27, 1607.

17. The Descent into Hell.

The seventeenth play is Christ's Descent into Hell, performed by the Cooks. In most cases the Harrowing of Hell was the *Cooks' Play* because " they take things out of the fire " ; though in the York cycle not the Cooks but the Saddlers have this part.

Dr. Ward thinks that this subject was one of the first to take true dramatic shape and formed a link between the religious dialogues and the religious drama. It certainly lends itself to dramatic treatment, and the fact that MSS. of this play are found among some of the

earliest mysteries we possess supports the idea. Personally I favour the Nativity as being the first subject likely to take the true dramatic form. However that may be, the Harrowing of Hell was an early subject in the mystery plays. It also found early representation in pictorial form; for a mosaic, now lost, existed in the oratory of Pope John VII at Rome, which dated from the eighth century. The oldest pictures extant appear to be a mosaic in the cathedral of Torcello and one in the central dome of St. Mark's, Venice, both belonging to the early 12th century. The earliest story of Christ's Descent into Hell to bring forth the righteous dead is found in the second part of the Gospel of Nicodemus, which is believed to date from the second or third century, but the germ is to be found in the New Testament, in the First Epistle of Peter. The subject as displayed in the mysteries was taken from the apocryphal Gospel.

The Descent into Hell did not become officially recognised in the Christian faith until A.D. 359, when at the Fourth Synod of Sirmium the clause " He descended into Hades " was introduced into the Apostles' Creed.

The *Evangelium Nicodemi* was at some period translated into English verse. The earliest MSS. of this poem belong to the fifteenth century, but Professor Hulme asserts that these must be considered copies of earlier ones, and it is undoubtedly from this source that our mystery plays are derived. There are, however, considerable differences between the poetical Gospel of Nicodemus and the Descent into Hell plays in the mysteries.

The play begins with speeches by Adam, Isaiah, Simeon, Seth and David. They have seen a light, the harbinger of the Deliverer, and David exclaims:—

> " Come, lord ! Come to Hell anone
> And take out thy folk, everychon,
> For those years are fully gone
> Sith mankynd came heare."

Then follows a conversation between Satan and some of his followers. Satan also has seen Jesus approaching and calling his demons says:—

" Hell hownds, all that be here,
Make you bowne with Boast and Bere,
For to this fellowship in feere,
Ther hyes a fearly freak."

Arriving at the gates, Jesus commands them to open:—

" Open Hell gates anone !
You Princes of payn, everchon !
That God's sonne may in gone,
And the Kinge of Blisse ! "

One is reminded all through this passage of the famous scene in the Inferno where the progress of Virgil and Dante is opposed by demons at the gates of the city of Dis, and as those gates opened at the touch of the divine power, so here the gates of hell fall before the victorious Redeemer. The first to be rescued is Adam:—

" Peace to the, Adam, my Darlinge;
And eke to all thy ofspringe.
To blisse now I will you bringe,
Ther you shall be without endinge;
Michael, lead these men sininge
To joy that lasteth ever."

There is no mention in our Chester plays of Eve. In both the Towneley and York she appears with Adam. In this respect the Chester mysteries follow the Gospel of Nicodemus, for she is not mentioned there.

Here we have a curious little touch. When Adam sees Enoch and Elijah, evidently for the first time, Adam and the rest are evidently supposed to be spirits, for he is surprised that the two men who were translated without death should appear in their bodily form:—

" Say, what maner men bene yee,
That bodely meten us, as I see,
And Dead come not to Hell as we,
Since all men Damned were ? "

It would be interesting to know how in the actual plays Enoch and Elijah were differentiated from the others—evidently the difference could only be one of costume. Judging by all pictorial representations that of the souls in hell was very scanty.

Another figure which Adam is surprised to see is the penitent thief, who is carrying his cross on his shoulder.

Adam: And who is this that comes here
With crosse on shoulder in such manere ?

Latro: I am that theefe, my fader deere,
That honge on Roode tree.

The expression "Roode tree" seems curious. I have not found it used anywhere else except in reference to the cross of the central figure.

At the ends of the MS. of this play there is an addition which is probably later than the first part. It is the story of "a tavenere" or ale-wife who has given false measure, who tells us that:—

"Of cannes I kept no trewe mesuer,
My cuppes I soulde at my pleasure,
Deceavinge manye a creature,
Tho my ale were naughte.
And when I was a brewer longe,
With hoopes I made my ale stronge,
Ashes and erbes I blende amonge,
And marred so good maulter."

For her there is no forgiveness. Satan says to her:—

"Welkome, deare darlinge, to us, all three;
Though Jesus be gone with our meanye,
Yet shall thou abyde heare still with me,
In paine withoute ende."

As pointed out previously the incident shows how the people of the middle ages regarded and suffered from false measures.

18. The Resurrection.

The eighteenth play is Christ's Resurrection, played by the Skinners.

This play opens with two verses in French spoken by Pilate. It is difficult to obtain the exact sense of these verses and there are considerable differences between the various readings in the extant manuscripts. The line

Nostre Dame fuit Judge

suggests that it was penned when the cult of the Virgin was at its height, say during the 13th or 14th centuries. Pilate after these verses relapses into the vernacular and proclaims his greatness in words which remind us of Herod's rantings. He is troubled by the signs which followed the Crucifixion and suggests to Caiaphas and Annas that they should make quite sure regarding the burying of Jesus "In a Tomb of Stone." He also determines to set a guard at the sepulchre and calls four *knights* to him and charges them to keep strict watch. Their names are curious:—

Sir Colphran and Sir Jerefas
Aroysat and Sir Gerapas.

Although four guards are selected only three speak any words, the fourth being never mentioned. It is significant in this connection that in mediæval art as a rule only three guards are represented at the Tomb.[1] As soon as the guards are at their places we get the stage direction: "Tunc cantabunt duo Angeli *Christus resurgens a mortuis*, etc., et Christus tunc resurget, ac cantu finito ut sequitur . . ." The first words of *Jesus Resurgens* are very curious:

Earthly man, that I have wrought,
Awake out of thy sleepe!
Earthly man, whom I have bought,
Of me thou take no keepe.
From heaven man's sowl I sought,
Into a Dongeon deepe;
My deere Lemmon from thence I brought,
For ruthe of her I weep.

[1] Dürer's "Die Kleine Passion" is an exception. He there represents four soldiers guarding the Tomb. The woodcut in Caxton's *Golden Legend* has only three.

It is hard to know what to make of the last two lines. That they are corrupt I think there can be no doubt, but it is curious that the various manuscripts do not furnish any substantial difference in the readings. The word *Lemmon* was probably introduced at a late date. If we turn to the Towneley play of the Resurrection of the Lord we obtain something nearer the original:—

Jesus Earthly man, that I have wroght,
Nightly wake, and slepe thou noght!
With Bytter Bayll I have the boght,
To make the fre;
Into this dongeon depe I soght,
And all for luf of the.

The guards hasten to Pilate to inform him of Christ's resurrection. Pilate charges them with having sold the body, to which the *Tertius Miles* replies:—

Now by the order that I bear of knight,
He rose up in the morning light
By vertu of his own might,
I knowe it well afyne;
He rose up, as I say now,
And left us lying, I wott near how!
All be-massed in a sowne,
As we had been sticked swyne.

The *Primus Miles* says:—

He sett his foote upon my backe,
That every lith began to cracke;
I would not byde such another shacke
For all Jerusalem.

I do not know of any picture representing Christ rising from the tomb with His foot upon a soldier's back. But there is a mosaic in the convent of Daphni near Athens in which Christ is bringing the elect out of hell (an open tomb) with His foot upon the back of Satan.

The scene now changes to the sepulchre, where the three Maries have come to anoint the body. Here we have simply the New Testament story put into simple and

beautiful verse. Some of the passages are as fine as anything in the whole cycle. At the end, however, comes a glorification of the apostle Peter. When he realises that Christ is indeed risen his one thought is about his denial of his Lord and he desires to ask forgiveness "for my fowle mis-deed." Jesus meets him with:—

Peter, knows thou not me?

Peter: A! Lord, mercy I aske thee,
With full hart, knelinge on my knee;
Forgive me my Trespase.

Jesus: Peter, so I thee beheight,
Thou should forsake me that night:
But of this deed thou have in sight,
When thou has Soverainty;
Thinke on thyne own deed to-day,
That flesh is frayle and fallinge aye,
And merciful be thou allway,
As now I am to thee.
Therefore I suffered thee to fall,
That to thy Subiects, here after, all
That to thee shall cry and call
Thou may have minning.
Sithen thy self so fallen hase,
The more inclyne to graunt Grace!
Goe forth—forgeven is thy Trespase—
And have here my Blessinge!

19. The Incident of Emmaus.

Play nineteen is Christ's Appearance to the two Disciples, played by the Saddlers and Saddletree Makers.

It begins with a conversation between Luke and Cleopas on the journey to Emmaus. Jesus joins them, as in the Gospel account, and is known to them in the blessing of the bread, they returning at once with the tidings to the other disciples. While they are discussing the news Jesus appears. Curiously the stage direction describes the place where they are gathered together as *castellum*. Peter and Andrew are the only two of the disciples who speak during this scene. Both are doubtful

about the real presence of Jesus and He to reassure them asks for food:—

Have you any meat hear ?
Petrus: Yea, my lord, leefe and deer,
Roasted fishe and hony, in feere,
Thereof we have good wonne.
Jesus: Eate we then, in good manere:
Thus you know without were
That ghost to eate hath no power,
As you shall see anon.

All through these scenes one of the greatest proofs offered of the corporeal presence of the risen Christ is the operation of taking food. In the Golden Legend six *manners* are given as showing that Jesus " arose in his proper body," the third of which is " by eating openly and by no art fantastic." After Jesus has vanished from their midst the disciples leave their *castellum* and wend their way, according to the stage instructions, " versus Bethaniam." They are joined by Thomas, who refuses to believe in the appearances to the others. Again Jesus appears and events happen as in the Gospels. The play finishes with the prayer:—

Christ geve you grace to take the way
Unto that joy that lasteth aye !
For thers no night, but ever day;
For all you thither shall goe.

Finis Paginae Decimae Nonae
Julii 29 Anno Domini 1607.

20. The Ascension.

The twentieth play is Christ's Ascension, performed by the Taylers.

There is no real break between this and the preceding play: Jesus virtually continues His discourse from the last scene and the disciples are yet uncertain about His bodily existence. Peter exclaims:—

A ! What is this that standes us bye ?
A ghost me him semeth witterly;
Me thinks lightned much am I
This spirit for to see.

Again Jesus by way of quietening their fears asks for food. After they have eaten come the stage directions: " Tunc abducet discipulos in Bethaniam, et cum pervenerit ad locum Jhesus, stans in loco ubi ascendit, dicat: *Data est mihi omnis potestas in caelo et in terra.*" From which we might infer that at this point the company moved from the lower stage of the pageant to the upper, but it is more probable that the disciples remained on the lower stage and that Jesus was hoisted by *angels* to the upper one. For we have at the moment of ascension the instructions: " Tunc Jesus ascendet et in ascendendo cantabit Jhesus ut sequitur." Then follows the Latin chant:—

Ascendo ad Patrem meum et Patrem vestrum, Deum meum et Deum vestrum. Alleluia ! Alleuluya !

Angelus Primus.

Quis est iste qui venit de Edom, tinctis vestibus de Bosra ?

Angelus Secundus.

Iste formosus in stola sua, gradiens in multitudine fortitudinis suae ?

Jesus.

Ego qui loquor justiciam et propugnator sum ad salvandum.

Angelus Tertius.

Et vestimenta tua sicut calcantium in torculari.

Jesus.

Torcular calcavi solus, et de gentibus non est vir mecum.

It is rather startling to find the words of the well-known passage in Isaiah applied here to the ascended Christ, but for the source of this passage we must turn to the Golden Legend, which says:

And also that He ascended with a great multitude of angels it appeareth by the interrogations that the angels made of the deputations to them beneath. When Jesu Christ ascended into heaven as Isaiah recordeth (Isaiah lxiii): " Quis est iste qui venit de

Edom," etc.: Who is he that cometh from Edom with his clothes dyed? whereas saith the gloss that some of the angels that knew not plainly the mystery of the incarnation, of His passion and of His resurrection, that saw our Lord ascend with all a great multitude of angels and of saints by His own virtue, marvelled and said to the angels that accompanied Him: Who is this that cometh from Edom? And yet they said: Who is the King of Glory, etc.? St. Denis in the book of the Hierarchy of Holy Angels in the seventh chapter saith: Thus seemeth it that he said that three questions were made to the angels when that Jesus ascended . . . . of which they demanded among them: Who is this that cometh from Edom, His clothes dyed of Bosra? This word Edom is as much to say as full of blood and this word Bosra is to say anguish and tribulation. Thus as they would have said: Who is this that cometh from the world full of blood by the sin of the world and of malice against God? And our Lord answered: I am He that speaketh in justice.

Next to the Scriptures these mysteries owed more to the Legenda Aurea than to any other source, though there are things in them which are not found in either. After the Ascension there is a dialogue between Jesus and the angels which is mainly the preceding Latin done into English. At the end there are some rather curious words uttered by Jesus about His blood shed upon the "Rood tree," which looks like a reference to the San Grail:

> These bloudy dropps that you may see,
> All they freshe shall resarved be,
> Till I come in my maiesty
> To Deme the last day.

The play ends with the words of Peter:

> Goe we, Brethren, with one assent,
> And fulfill his Commandement;
> But looke that none through dreed be blent,
> But leevs all stidfastly.
>
> Pray we all, with full intent,
> That he to us his ghost will sent.
> Jesu, that from us is went,
> Save all this Company! Amen.

1607 Julii 30.
Finis Paginae Vicesimae.

21. Pentecost.

Play twenty-one is the Sending of the Holy Ghost, played by the Fishmongers.

The last few plays show a falling off in dramatic power. More and more they become simply dialogues. Much of the old crudeness has gone, but with it have gone also the simplicity and spontaneity of the earlier plays. From the purely literary point of view they have improved, but as drama there has been a great falling off, and the last four plays might be easily reduced to narrative dialogue, though in the final one, " The Last Judgement," there is a slight return to the earlier manner but not enough for vitality.

The Sending of the Holy Ghost is little more than a poetic rendering of the Creed, in which each apostle recites one or more verses. It is only from the stage directions that we learn of the descent of the Holy Spirit. Actually this part must have been dumb show.

After having received the Holy Spirit the apostles are able to speak various tongues as recorded in the Acts. But it is interesting to note the geographical terms of the mystery where they differ from the New Testament classification. The *multitude* of Acts is represented by two *strangers*, Primus and Secundus *Alienigena.*

> Of all languages that be hereby,
> That come to Mesopotamye,
> Capadocia and Jewry,
> The Janglen, withouten ween;
> Of the Isle of Ponthus and Asye,
> Frizeland and Pamphilye
> Of Egipt right in Lybby,
> Which is besyde Syrene.
> Yea, also men of Arabye,
> And of Greece, that is thereby.

It is significant that there is no mention of Rome; the writer took Latin for granted and did not think it necessary to mention it. There seem to be two copyist's

errors in these verses. At first sight the word *Janglen* is rather puzzling, for one begins to wonder what locality it stands for. The use of the capital would in modern times suggest a place and the scribe who wrote this text may have taken it for such. It is probably the word *janglinge*, meaning *murmuring* or even quarrelling.

Again Frizeland is evidently a corruption of Phrygia though it does sound like the northern coast of the Zuider Zee !

22-24. Concluding Plays.

The last three plays, Nos. 22, 23, and 24, may be briefly considered together.

The first two deal with the Coming of Antichrist and the final one with the Last Judgment.

The primary problem is to determine whether these are very old plays or have been tacked on to the cycle at a later date. The problem is one difficult of solution, because it is possible to make out a case for each point of view. The subject of Antichrist is as old as the Jewish apocalyptical literature and was firmly planted in the Christian thought of the second century of our era. From that period down to the Reformation the idea of Antichrist assumed various forms. Many of the Reformers regarded the pope as Antichrist; but they were not the first so to view the papacy, for before their day some of the stricter brethren of the Franciscans, scandalised by the wealth and luxury of the supreme pontiffs, had come to regard them as the enemy of Christ and actually Antichrist. After the Reformation the idea of Antichrist gradually ceased to have much prominence in religious thought.

Can we by internal evidence discover the period of these plays? I think the answer is in the negative. The first point to consider is the value of these plays as dramas—spectacles—for that is essentially what these

mysteries were; they entered the realm of literature only in the days when the acting was over or nearly so. We can say at once that from the dramatic point of view they are failures. They are composed of long tedious monologues devoid of action except for the beheading of Enoch and Elias, a very tame affair of which we should hardly know but for the stage directions. This point is rather against their early representation. The second subject to be considered is the style. Here we are bound to admit that the style in places justifies their being ranked as early as any of the other dramas, and we may remark in passing that we find in them as much alliteration as in any other plays in the cycle. Piers Plowman can hardly show a better example than the following line from the 23rd play:—

Thou feture, ferd with fantasy.

If they were a late production the style of the earlier plays was very well imitated; in fact it is possible to argue that they are too carefully composed to have originated at the same time as the other dramas. It is evident that a good deal of thought was expended in their composition. They suggest a scholarly hand. At the same time it must be remembered that they may have been recast, as undoubtedly parts of other mysteries have been, by later scribes. They have great dramatic possibilities, which may have had much more scope in the actual pageants than can be gathered from the text.

Another thing to be considered is their eschatology. In different ages various personages have been regarded as Antichrist: Nero and Caligula among the early Christians, at a later date both the Pope and Muhammed. In the plays before us Antichrist is neither the Pope nor Muhammed. The eschatology is purely that of the middle ages, in which not Satan or Lucifer or Beelzebub (each of which had at some time been regarded as the Anti-

christ) is Antichrist, but some being whose personality it is rather hard to define. In our drama he actually calls upon all these for assistance. Still less is he any historical personage. This strongly points to a time prior to the Muhammedan conquest in Europe or to the Reformation, for then Antichrist would almost certainly have been associated with the prophet of Mecca or the supreme Pontiff. Dr. Gayley states that this Chester drama shows kinship with a Latin play acted on the Continent *circa* 1160. He does not say what this play is and I have not been able to locate it.[1] Of course much of the material is drawn from the Gospel of Nicodemus—this is the source of the Enoch and Elijah incident—and also from the Cursor Mundi and the Golden Legend.

I think another influence can be traced in these Chester plays of Antichrist. They seem to me to suggest an organised realm of evil, of which Antichrist is the supreme ruler. In the 15th and 16th centuries an attempt was made to reduce the chaotic state of demonology to order, with the result that a State of Evil, with its ministers and ambassadors, was formulated on the model of European monarchies. This found expression in the work of Johannes Wierus, *Pseudomonarchia Daemonum*, in which the kingdom of Evil is set before us in all its institutions, even to the allocation of ambassadors to the European States. Seven of these demon plenipotentiaries are named as representatives to France, England (to whom is sent Mammon), Turkey, Russia, Spain, Italy and Switzerland. Now in the 23rd play, where Antichrist is speaking to the kings who have espoused his cause, he promises them as reward:

> To thee I geeve Lumbardy,
> And to the Denmark and Hungary,
> And take thou Pathmos and Italy,
> And Roome it shall be thyne.

[1] *Plays of our Forefathers*: By Charles Mills Gayley, Litt.D., LL.D. Chatto and Windus, 1908.

It is hard to account for this passage, and I suggest that (having in mind the work of Johannes Wierus) the writer meant to imply the complete dominion of Antichrist. True, Italy was already in the list but its selection may have been due to the exigencies of rhyme. Patmos may have been selected also to convey the idea of complete sovereignty, because from there John's Vision took in the four corners of the world.

There is one other topical allusion. When Enoch and Elijah withstand Antichrist he speaks of them as *Loul-lords*. In the light of what follows, their execution, we might infer this to have been written about the time of the Lollard persecution, the beginning of the 15th century. On the other hand, it might have been penned by a Protestant sympathiser, in which case it would imply a compliment to them, the inference being that it was written after the triumph of Lollardism in the reign of Edward VI (1547). So that we are not able to date this passage within a century.

My own opinion is that these plays are in conception as old as any of the others in the cycle but that they have been considerably recast and extended, and I doubt if they were ever acted in the form in which we have them now. The only thing about which one can be sure is that they have been compiled from many sources, probably from more than any of the others in the cycle.

The final play, that of The Last Judgment, played by the Websters, is much simpler in scheme than the corresponding plays in the York and Towneley cycles. In construction it is very simple but not devoid of dramatic touches. The first persons to answer the summons to judgment are a Pope, an Emperor, a King and a Queen. Although all these have sins to confess they are saved. Then again appear a Pope, an Emperor, a King and Queen, a Lawyer and a Merchant; all of these are condemned and handed over to demons. It is possible that the writer had

some actual personages in view in these characters, but probably they are simply types, though they could be very easily made to fit any unpopular potentate. When the first Pope says he has been in the grave "three hundred years and three," we are set speculating who he can be and from what date the years are to be counted but when a little later on the Emperor announces that he has been in purgatory "three hundred years and three" we realize that no importance can be attached to the figures.

Referring to the lost souls Jesus says that not

> My sweet mother dere,
> and all the saints that ever were,

could save them; which proves that this passage must have been written when the exaltation of the Virgin had declined somewhat.[1]

The manuscript of the last play of our Chester Cycle concludes thus:—

> Laus maxima omnipotenti!
> Deo gratias
> Finis Vicesimae Quartae Paginae
> Anno Domini 1607, Augusti Quarto, Anno Regni Regis Jacobi Quinto; per Jacobum Miller.

[1] A testator in 1495 bequeaths his soul "to allmyghty God my Creator, Saviour and Redemer, and to his mooste blessed moder Saint Mary Virgin Quene of heven, Lady of the Worlde and Emporesse of Helle." *Five Centuries of Religion*, by G. G. Coulton.

APPENDIX.

The Manchester Manuscript.

BY the kindness of Mr. Axon of the Manchester Public Library, I was enabled to examine the page of the Chester Mystery Play preserved in the Reference Library. It is a leaf of parchment measuring $7\frac{1}{2}$ by $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches. I reckon that two inches have been torn from the bottom so that it was probably $7\frac{1}{2}$ by $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches. It contains the opening lines of the 18th Play, Christ's Resurrection. There are seven lines missing, Nos. 14 to 20 inclusive, not eight lines as Dr. Furnivall states. In several words the spelling differs from our other MSS. Dr. Furnivall stated it to be a late 15th century MS., while Greg dates it the middle of the 16th century. On what grounds, however, they attribute it to these dates I do not know. Although one hesitates to differ from these authorities, I cannot find any reason for thinking it earlier than the end of the 16th or beginning of the 17th century.

The connection of the Chester Cycle with the French Mysteries.

Although I believe our English Mysteries to be mainly derived from the French I do not mean that they were directly translated from *le Mystère du Viel Testament* or from the *Nouveau Testament*, because this would place their introduction into England too late, as the former was only printed about 1500 and the latter about 1450. Both these were collections of plays that had been performed for at least a hundred years and probably longer. Indeed I regard Pierre le Dru and Arnoul Greban as but the scribes who collected and gave a literary form to plays

that had been acted for some considerable time, just as I believe the writers of our Chester MSS. did.

It is possible that they were compiled for the Confrères de la Passion, who produced the whole Cycle of the *Viel Testament* in 1542.

The literary style of these French Mysteries to my mind shows that they had travelled far before reaching the garb in which they are known to us. They are capable of elaborate production, as we know from the description by Petit de Julleville of the performances at Valenciennes in 1547. But Mystery Plays did not start like this. The English Mysteries were undoubtedly derived from the French Plays of 14th and 15th centuries. To account for the similarities, especially in the earlier plays, existing between the French and English MSS. we can only suppose that both were based upon "Actors' Copies." Our Chester versions, which all range from 1591 to 1607, may owe much directly to the *Viel Testament*, but this cannot apply to the York and Towneley. The York manuscript dates from somewhere about 1430, and the Towneley, 1388, while the Coventry cannot be placed later than the end of the 15th century, and I should be inclined to date it much earlier.

While admitting the French origin of the Mysteries it cannot be too strongly asserted that in the form we possess them to-day they are essentially English, the French element is vestigial.

Many of the subjects in the French Cycle never entered into English at all, such as the Sethite Sons of God, the drunkenness of Noah, Pharaoh's attentions to Sarah, Joseph and Potiphar's wife, David and Bathsheba, and others of a like obscene nature.

As far as I know, the only one of these subjects treated in English is the story of David and Bathsheba in the Cornish Cycle, and it is very mild compared with its Gallic neighbour.

Alterations in the Plays.

I have more than once expressed the opinion that considerable alterations had been made in several plays, and although we have no documentary proof of the changes in the Chester Cycle and can only make deductions from internal evidence of the plays themselves, support is given to these deductions by the fact that we do know of changes occurring in other Cycles. In 1415 the York Plays were listed as fifty-one, another list has fifty-seven, while to-day we have only forty-eight. The Beverley Cycle shows still more changes. In 1390 there were thirty-eight, in 1411 a play was added, in 1495 a play was divided, while in 1520 the number of plays was thirty-six. We can quite understand that when the trade guilds took up the acting of the Mysteries, plays would be added or dropped from time to time according to the number and condition of the guilds, and that a play might be divided between two guilds. This would explain many things that are puzzling in the manuscripts as we have them to-day. In more than one case I suspect a play to have been divided and rather badly put together again.

The Stations.

The city of York limited the stations where the pageants were to be performed to twelve. There is no trace, however, of the sites where the plays were given at Chester, except that we know they started at the Abbey gateway and proceeded to the Cross; from there we do not know what the route was.

In 1417 the restrictions which had only been renewed in that year were removed and plays were allowed to be performed before the door of those "who would pay the highest price for the privilege."[1] Probably the Chester shows were given in the front of the houses of the chief

[1] Introduction to the York Plays by Lucy Toulmin Smith, Clarendon Press, 1885.

citizens. Chester was a small town, the circumference of the walls is only two miles, and would have appeared during the Middle Ages to have been a very compact city, though probably there was always a certain amount of open space in the vicinage of the Castle. Here two or more shows might be performed simultaneously, but I think it is a fair presumption that all the main streets had many stations where the waggons were halted for a performance.

I can find no records of any street decorations for the performance of the Mysteries. In the early days we can be confident that nothing in that line was done, but possibly later there may have been some attempts in that direction. There is a passage in Dunbar's account[1] of Queen Margaret's visit to Aberdeen in 1511, when a cycle of plays was given for her entertainment which might be construed as implying decorations for the plays:

> The Streittis war all hung with tapestrie,
> Great was the press of peopill dwelt about,
> And pleasant padgeanes playit prattelie.

I think it probable, however, that the decorations were in honour of the Queen and not of the plays; as this is the only reference I can find to Mysteries and *tapestrie*.

The Players.

When the Mysteries ceased to be played by the clergy and were taken over by the trade guilds, it is possible that some difficulty might be experienced in finding members sufficiently educated to act the parts, for some of the speeches were long and difficult, at least for artisans, whose education could hardly have been equal to many parts in the cast. Perhaps we have a side-light on the method that may have been adopted, in an incident recorded to have happened during a representation of a Cornish Play. Edwin Norris[2] quotes the following from

[1] Dunbar, The Queen's Reception at Aberdeen. Scott, Text Soc.
[2] Ancient Cornish Drama.

Richard Carew's *Survey of Cornwall*, published in 1602: "A miracle Play is a kind of Enterlude, compiled in Cornish out of some scripture history, with that grosseness which accompanied the Romanes *Vetus Comedia*. For representing it, they raise an earthen amphitheatre in some open field, having the Diameter of enclosed playne some 40 or 50 foot. The country people flock from all sides, many miles off, to hear and see it, for they have therein devils and devices to delight as well the eye as the eare; the players conne not their parts without bookes, but are prompted by one called the Ordinary, who followeth at their back with the booke in his hand, and telleth them softly what they must pronounce allowd." It is possible that some such method may have been adopted in Chester and that each pageant may have had a prompter to give the words, which the characters repeated. This, of course, would not be necessary in the later days of the plays, when education had become more general, though on occasion this system might even then have had to be followed.

The Sacrifice of Isaac.

Besides our Chester Play there are five others extant on this subject, one in each of the Cycles, York, Towneley and Coventry, and the Brome and Dublin Plays. The nearest to ours is the Brome (15th century MSS.). Professor Pollard thinks that both these were taken from some common source. From the dramatic point of view the Chester is superior, though it loses considerably by not having the scene between Abraham and Isaac after the ordeal. It is possible that this scene was at one time in the play but was cut out to make room for the didactic termination which we now have. At some time someone connected with these Chester Mysteries became possessed with the idea of always pointing the moral. We have certainly no reason to thank the person who introduced the *Expositor*.

Of the other cycle plays on this subject the Towneley is the best, but a long way behind the Chester in charm and pathos. The Coventry is a very poor play, though possibly we have only fragments by which to judge, for while not dogmatising I cannot regard the Ludus Coventriae as more than a very abridged edition of some East Midland Cycle. The York Play of *Isaac* is spoiled by making Isaac thirty years old—a type of Christ. The Dublin Play, though not equal to the Chester or the Brome, is a fine production, with here and there a suggestion of a touch of humour, as where Abraham tells Isaac to put on his clothes and not let his mother know what had taken place, or again in Sarah's straight talk to Abraham when she learns of the incident. It is quite possible that in this Dublin manuscript we have the real text of the Coventry play. The language is the East Midland dialect, and as Mr. Waterhouse in his introduction to the E.E.T.S. edition points out, the grammatical features approach to the Coventry Cycle. But the greatest argument to my mind for the above supposition is the fact that on a page of the MS. of this play in Trinity College, Dublin, are inscribed the names of the mayors and bailiffs of Northampton, which clearly indicates the district the MS. came from, and if the N——— towne mentioned in the Coventry Play is Northampton, of which I think there can be little doubt, we may have here a better sample of the Coventry Cycle than any in the Ludus Coventriae.

Though none of our English Mysteries have the perfection of language of *Le Mistère du Viel Testament*, yet in naturalness and simplicity they surpass the French. Compare the childlike utterances of the Isaac of our Chester Play with the dignified and sophisticated speech of the Isaac of *du Sacrifice d'Abraham*. Fine as is the following speech from the literary point of view, considered as that of a boy about to be sacrificed to "la divine Voulente" it is rather staggering:

Isaac.

O Dieu de parfaicte bonté
Pour quoy suis je icy hault monté
Pour encourir ce vitupére
Que je sois a la mort bonté,
Brullé, mis en cendre et venté,
Par la main de mon propre père?
Las! père, vostre humanité
Aura el bien l'austerité
De vouloir telle euvre parfaire?
Ce sera grant crudelité
Pour vous, sans avoir merité,
De vouloir vostre ply deffaire.

The Shepherds' Herbs.

The herbs which the first shepherd in the *Adoration of the Shepherds* produces for curing the diseases of sheep are an interesting collection; they are:—

Henbane	Finter
Horehound	Fanter
Ribbie	Fetterfoe
Raddish	Peny Wrytt
Egremond	

Several of these I cannot identify. In the H. MSS. (Harl. 2124) the third and fourth names on the list are written *Ribbie, raddish,* evidently two words. The W. MSS. (Addit. 10,305) has *Bybbey raydishe,* which Thomas Wright when editing this manuscript for the Shakespeare Society evidently regarded as a single substantive. To add to the confusion the Bodley MS. has *tibbie.* What this herb or herbs may have been I cannot conjecture.

Finter, Fanter and Fetterfoe offer another puzzle. What the first two are I do not know. I venture the suggestion that the last name *fetterfoe* may be *Feather few* (Chrysanthemum parthenium). This plant has medicinal properties and was well known to the old herbalist. It was used in fomentations as a cure for inflammations. Whether it was used for sheep I cannot say, but in the

Middle Ages what was a remedy for man was considered a remedy for beast.

With the rest of the list we are on known ground.

Henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*) has been employed in medicine from the earliest times. It is not indigenous to this country and was first cultivated in herb gardens by the monks from where it spread. It now grows wild.

Horehound (*Ballota nigra*). Dioscorides in his Materia Medica, a Latin version of which appeared in 1478, affirms this plant to be an antidote for the bite of a mad dog. We have a direct reference to this herb in Beaumont and Fletcher's " The Faithful Shepherdess ":

> This is the clote bearing a yellow flower,
> And this black horehound: both are very good
> For sheep or shepherd bitten by a wood-
> Dog's venom'd tooth.

Evidently here was a useful plant both for the shepherd and his flocks.

Egremond. This is undoubtedly our Agrimony (*Agrimonia Eupatoria*). This plant in the Middle Ages was regarded as a cure for many diseases. In an infusion it was considered an excellent purifier of the blood and is I believe still used in some districts as a " Spring drink."

Peny wrytt. This is Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*), though it is not a plant we should expect to find in such a list, as it was supposed that by eating it, sheep contracted disease. A popular name for it in this connection was *Whiterot.* Perhaps it got into the shepherd's pharmacy on some principle of homeopathy.

These plants are all found in Cheshire to-day.

Structure of the Plays.

		Verses.	Lines.
1	The Fall of Lucifer	52	280
2	The Creation	88	704
3	The Deluge	48	372
4	The Sacrifice of Isaac	61	476
5	Balaam and Balak	56	448

		Verses.	Lines.
6	The Nativity	92	736
7	Adoration of the Shepherds	121	662
8	Adoration of the Magi	55	413
9	The Magi's Oblation	34	264
10	Slaying of the Innocents	66	496
11	Purification	48	336
12	The Temptation	38	304
13	Christ. The Adulteress. Cheledonius	74	489
14	Christ's Visit to Simon the Leper ..	54	432
15	Christ's Betrayal	46	368
16	Christ's Passion	111	892
17	Christ's Descent into Hell	40	320
18	Christ's Resurrection	67	527
19	Christ appears to two Disciples ..	35	276
20	Christ's Ascension	24	192
21	The Sending of the Holy Ghost	49	390
22	The Prophets and Antichrist	43	340
23	The Coming of Antichrist	97	730
24	The Last Judgment	89	708

RHYMES.

The Fall of Lucifer	ab. ab. second stanza irregular
The Creation	aaab. aaab .cccb.
The Deluge	aaab. aaab. cccb.
The sacrifice of Isaac	aaab. aaab. cccb.
Balaam and Balak	aaab. aaab. cccb.
The Nativity	aaab. aaab. cccb.
Adoration of the Shepherds	aaab. aaab. cccb. abab. aab. aab.
Adoration of the Magi	aaab. aaab. cccb. ababbcc.
The Magi's Oblation	aaab. aaab. cccb.
Slaying of the Innocents	aaab. aaab. cccb. abab.
Purification	aaab. aaab. cccb. abab.
Temptation	aaab. aaab. cccb.
Christ and the Adulteress	ababbcc. aaab. aaab. cccb. (One verse abab. I regard this verse as an interpolation).
Christ's Visit to Simon the Leper	aaab. aaab. cccb.
Christ's Betrayal	aaab. aaab. cccb.
Christ's Passion	aaab. aaab. cccb.
Christ's Descent into Hell	aaab. aaab. cccb.
Christ's Resurrection	aaab. aaab. cccb. abab.
Christ appears to two Disciples	aaab. aaab. cccb.

Christ's Ascension	aaab. aaab. cccb.
The Sending of the Holy Ghost	aaab. aaab. cccb.
The Prophets and Antichrist	aaab. aaab. cccb.
The Coming of Antichrist	aa. bb. aaab. aaab. cccb. aab. aab. abab.
The Last Judgment	aaab. aaab. cccb.

All the plays are alliterative, but in varying degrees. The best examples of alliteration are to be found, as we should anticipate, in the short metres. The Adoration of the Shepherds contains many such. I select the following:

Such a sight seming,
And a light gleming
Letts me for to looke.
All, to my deming,
From a starre streming
It to me stroke.

I have come to the conclusion that it is impossible to talk of false rhymes in these plays, because just as there was great latitude in orthography, spelling being very much according to each one's fancy, so pronunciation was also allowed great latitude. In The Temptation we find *stone* made to rhyme with *clean* and in the very next verse it is made to rhyme correctly, according to modern pronunciation, with *alone*. Another debatable point is: Was the final *e* sounded? When it helped the rhyme probably it was, but I think as a general rule it was not. It must not be forgotten that our Chester manuscripts are all of a late date, written in the modern English period, and many words have undoubtedly been modernised in cases where they were not familiar to the transcriber. In the York, Towneley and Coventry Cycles we have manuscripts which are much earlier—written in the period Middle English. We are therefore at a great disadvantage in all philological considerations of the Chester Cycle.

The Sources of the Mystery Plays.

The chief source of the Mysteries—that upon which they are based—are the Old and New Testaments and

almost equally the Apocryphal Books. Besides these they have drawn largely from the Legenda Aurea and the Cursor Mundi. With regard to the last two, however, it is well to bear in mind that the Mystery Plays are older than either of these books. If we accept the date of the Chester Cycle (which is probably the oldest) as somewhere between 1268 and 1277, it is apparent that they could not have borrowed much originally from either, as the Legenda Aurea was not compiled until about 1275 and the Cursor Mundi about 1320. We must therefore seek to define clearly in what sense the Mysteries are indebted to these compilations, for that they are indebted there can be no doubt.

When Jacobus de Voragine compiled the Legenda Aurea, he simply gathered into a compact form the stories of the Saints which were current more or less in his day and for which his chief authorities were St. Jerome and Eusebius and probably other sources, including oral tradition, which are now lost to us. Many of these stories must therefore have been known to the writers of the Mystery Plays. We know that the Legenda Aurea was one of the most popular books of its day and must have spread the legendary knowledge of the lives of the Apostles and Saints considerably.

It is impossible for us now to determine to what extent the writers of the Mysteries copied from the work of Voragine. I think we are justified in surmising that they would use such a book freely for adding to their dramas whatever would be effective for their purpose. I have already pointed out that we must not regard these plays as we do Shakespeare's, as the work of one man. All through the ages of their performance they have been, in most cases, added to and altered until probably the manuscripts that we now possess would show considerable differences from those, supposing we had them, of an earlier date. It is interesting to note that Caxton printed

his two editions of the Golden Legend in 1483 and 1487, the time when the Mystery Plays were at the height of their popularity.

What I have said about the Legenda Aurea also holds good of the Cursor Mundi. Though later in date (1320) I believe it to have had a more direct influence upon the Mysteries than the former. The Legenda Aurea may have furnished incidents, but I am inclined to think that the Cursor Mundi finally gave the order in which we find the Cycles, though like the earth's crust the strata have been tilted and likewise in some places broken. In all early references to Mystery Plays, whether in England or on the Continent, we are struck by the apparent lack of any order, the plays for representation seem to have been chosen at random; but in all the Cycles there is a certain sequence, and the point I want to make is that the sequence is that of the Cursor Mundi. In that poem the order of events reviewed by the Northumbrian poet is as follows:— Beginning with the Trinity (as do the Chester and Towneley Cycles) he passes on to the Creation of the World, the fall of Lucifer and of Adam. Then the story of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob; Joseph, Moses, Saul, David, Solomon. Then the prophecies of the birth of Christ, Joachin and Anna, the birth of Mary. The birth of Christ, incidents in His life, the passion, resurrection, descent into hell, ascension, descent of the Holy Ghost, the coming of Antichrist, the signs of the end of the world and the Judgment. Now though no one of the Cycles has plays on all these subjects (though they may have had at one time), if we take all the Cycles together we shall find that the arrangement tallies very closely with the above. It is therefore possible that the Cursor Mundi had a direct influence upon the order of the plays in Cycles. It may be asked, why postulate any such influence? Could not the plays have taken the order in which we find them without any reference to other sources?

I think the answer is to be found in the fact that in the Middle Ages the drama was a new art (the traditions of the Greek and Roman drama had to wait until the Renaissance to be rediscovered) and as such would be greatly influenced by the methods of the older arts. The English drama of the 14th century had no traditions; English poetry had. The fact too that the drama had been nourished in its infancy by the Church would not be an asset to it when it had parted from its foster-mother and gone out into the market place.

Besides the sources already mentioned there were undoubtedly others[1] from which the Mysteries borrowed incidents and ideas—topical and local allusions and traditions and folk-lore. The incident of the stolen sheep in the Towneley Play of the Shepherds is a bit of pure folk-drama.

These Mystery Plays may be regarded as the most democratic things in English literature. Whatever may have been their original conception, they became in fact in the Middle Ages, of the people, by the people, for the people.

The Fifteen Signs.

These signs preceding the Day of Judgement were a subject of much interest in the Middle Ages and found plastic representation in English Alabasters. One in the possession of Dr. Philip Nelson illustrates the fifth sign, viz:—"the bluddye dewe," in a very realistic manner. Thos. Wright in a note to his edition of the Chester Mystery Plays points out that beside the source mentioned in the text, viz:—St. Jerome, the "Signs" are also to be found in the *Prognosticon futuri seculi* of Julianus Pomerius, a work of the 7th century.

[1] Possibly the Historia Scholastica of Peter Comestor, a popular textbook of the 12th century.

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